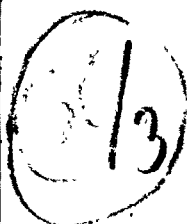


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CONFLICT OF POLITICAL SYSTEMS :

The Conquest of the Carnatic 1639-1801

STUART BLACKBURN

Introduction

Much has been written by Indian historians that attributes the British conquest of India in the 18th century to the disintegration of the Mughal Empire and to the internal political disorder in the sub-continent.¹ While internal disorder was certainly a factor, a recent conference on 18th century Indian history has suggested that, on the contrary, the successor states were viable.² Moreover, such a passive explanation downplays the role of the British and strangely lays blame for colonial subjugation on India itself. This paper approaches the problem of the conquest of South India neither in terms of internal disorder nor of external subjugation, but in terms of the interaction of the British within the indigenous political system. The question to examine is whether the British were able to conquer by functioning in traditional roles within the local system or by adopting new roles outside it. My thesis is that only when they were able to operate from without the system, by the acquisition of a resource base partially independent of it, were the British able to extend military and political dominion over most of the Carnatic. Before the 1740s, and even afterward, the Company functioned as subordinates to the Mughal rulers at Delhi, Golconda and later at Arcot, competing with other local and European rivals for Indian resources. By 1765 two changes were evident. First, the British had become the ruler and the Nawab of Arcot (hereafter simply the "Nawab") their dependent, a reversal of roles. Second, and more important, by virtue of their command

1 See for example, Alfred Lyall, *British Dominion in India* (London : 1911), p. 85 ; H. Furber, *The John Company at Work, A Study of European Expansion in the Late 18th Century*, (Cambridge : 1951), p. 17 ; and Edward Thompson and G. T. Garratt, *Rise and Fulfillment of British Rule in India* (Allahabad : 1962), pp. 54-65.

2 *Ideas in History, Proceedings of a Seminar on Ideas Motivating Social and Religious Movements and Political and Economic Policies during the 18th and 19th Centuries*, ed. Bissheshwar Prasad (Delhi : 1968), p. 338.

of an independent resource base, they were able to introduce a new political system, one defined by a hierarchical chain of command, that they attempted to impose on, or in place of, the traditional system of patronage that was rooted in kinship and territory. These two systems co-existed in conflict until the British bureaucracy ultimately won out, though never entirely.

The nature of the indigenous political system is difficult to explicate, but a few words of reference will be helpful. A recent article makes clear that only the term "tributary" can be reasonably applied to South Indian pre-modern states.³ That term has been utilized here. Also, Dumont has shown that there is an "alliance system" operative in Tamil marriages based on prestations, and Breckenridge extends this observation to the realm of temple activity and finds a system of "honor exchange" operative there.⁴ What is at the core of social relations for Tamils and everyone else, is the process of "making a connection". In Tamil this is expressed by the term "sambandam" (lit. "connection", "relationship"). This paper argues that the indigenous political system in the Tamil country is best approached through this indigenous concept, for one creates a sambandam in politics as much as in marriage. Indeed, the marriage and kin relations become a paradigm for political activity in both classical and folk literatures.⁵

I. *The British as Tributary, 1639-1740*

It is an immensely important fact that British settlements on the Coromandel Coast, as elsewhere, were *granted* to them by the local powers. In fierce competition with the Dutch and Portuguese in the early 1600s, the English did not seize these trading posts, but received them as a privilege, placing them in the role of a tributary to the powers that awarded them.

3 Burton Stein, "The State and the Agrarian Order in Medieval South India," in *Essays on South India* (ed. B. Stein), Asian Studies at Hawaii, 15 (1975), pp. 64-91.

4 Louis Dumont, "Hierarchy and Marriage Alliance in South Indian Kinship," *Occasional Papers of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 12 (1957) 45 p.; Carol Breckenridge "Betel-Nut and Honor : Exchange-Relationships and Temple Entry in a South Indian Temple," M.S., 1976.

5 For references to classical literature see K. Kailasapathy, M.S., 1976. *Tamil Heroic Poetry* (Oxford : 1968), pp. 202-3; and for folk examples see *Kan Cakip Cantai* (Madurai : 1972), pp. 28-45 and *Aivar Racakkaḷ kaṭai* (Madurai : 1974), pp. 120-35.

It was only after fourteen years of unsuccessful attempts on the upper Coromandel that the Company found a place both geographically and political hospitable. The original grant to the English of the town of Chennaipatanam was obtained from the Naik, or local raja, of the district adjacent to the Portuguese settlement of St. Thome. He got a cowle (or deed) from the Raja of Chandragheri (apparently a descendent of the defeated Vijayanagar kings) who was independent of the Muslim empires in the Deccan.⁶ This he presented to the Company in 1639. This was the origin of Fort St. George which was to become the base for British domination in S. India. At its inception the settlement was a strip of land 5 miles long and one mile wide along the seacoast.

As the Mughals of Golconda extended their dominion southward, the Raja of Chandragheri fled, and the Company obtained a new cowle from the new Emperors, paying an annual tribute of 1200 pagodas. Up to the establishment of the Subhadar of the Carnatic in 1694,⁷ the history of the English on the Coromandel is a series of conflicts with European and local rivals, mediated by the central authority in Golconda. The aim of the Company was trade, and their political activity was only to achieve this end. Thus English merchants acted the part of a model tributary treating the Mughal officials with extreme deference.⁸ In particular, whenever a new sovereign was coronated the English entered the court to negotiate a new grant. They also made presentations on other occasions, e.g. the marriage of the Emperor's daughter.⁹

The dependency of the Company upon local resources, in competition with other tributaries to the Mughal, is demonstrated by its conflicts with the Nayak of Poonamalle, Lingappa, from 1674-1681.¹⁰ Lingappa had been able to exact tribute from the Dutch at Pulicat and tried to do the same at Madras, but the British Governor refused.

6 For the early history of Madras, see J. T. Wheeler, *Madras in the Olden Time*, Vol. 1 (Madras : 1861), pp. 1 ff.

7 H. H. Dodwell, (ed.) *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol. 5 (Delhi: nd.), p. 104, suggests 1693, but K. Rajayyan, *A History of British Diplomacy in Tanjore* (Mysore : 1969), p. 14, says 1694.

8 Wheeler, Vol. 1, p. 81.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 82-3.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 83-87. These pages contain the story summarized in this paragraph.

Lingappa was then able to use his influence at the durbar in Golconda to convince the chief Brahmin that the English were paying too little for their grant and that they were improper in their conduct. He said that they did not accept the gifts he had brought them and gave him only "some broadcloth and looking glasses and nothing more." In addition, when the Divan's corn was sent to the city it was taxed, an audacious act by a tributary. The consequences were severe: the Company's corn and paddy trade was terminated, and more would have resulted had not a Maratha advance turned the attention of the Emperor from the petty affairs of the settlement. The English behaved like other local powers, deferring honour and tribute to a power stronger than they and competing with other tributaries for resources. Thus they sent the Emperor 600 yards of cloth (although 1000 was requested) and paid their rent 6 months in advance to insure his support.

Lingappa was not to be denied; and he was able to blockade the fort for months and nearly forced the British to capitulate. It was broken only when Company soldiers went on a raiding party and forced the inhabitants of the neighboring villages, for which the Company had grants, to give them their due. In this way the English struggled with their co-tributaries, but even then there were indications that the English had access to resources outside the local area of wealth which would prove decisive in the competition for the local resources. As an example, when Lingappa schemed to allow free traders to hinder Company trade, the Company simply bought him off with 7000 pagodas.¹¹

As the colony at Madras existed only precariously balanced between local competing interests it was forced to play the role of tributary each time power shifted at the top. When Aurangzeb conquered Golconda in 1687, the Diwan wrote to Madras requesting a higher tribute. When an official came to Madras to negotiate the issue, the Company gave him the gifts and the deference he expected and thus avoided the higher rent.¹² Here is a perfect example of how the British operated, skillfully manipulating the ad hoc, personal politics of presentations and honour dispursal that characterized traditional politics.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 126-7.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 211-12.

Another traditional political role the British were able to adopt in order to achieve the ends was that of the Poligar or local raja who was given tax rights in return for military assistance to the center. An example of this can be seen in the assistance during Aurangzeb's conquest of Ginjee (1690) for which they were given a new grant, confirming the old privileges and conferring new villages in the Ginjee territory.¹³

Nor were the British averse to functioning with the pomp and circumstance of the traditional system. On one occasion they sent a gift of 15,000 rupees to the Mughal, encamped near Ginjee; guns were fired and the Governor rode a horse (to please the Mughal), and presents were exchanged.¹⁴ Another revealing episode is the public reading of a cowle from the Nawab for three new villages to the inhabitants of those villages, complete with officiating Brahmins.¹⁵ Moreover, they were often the recipients of ceremony. Leaders of one of the new villages once came to the Governor with gifts of sheep, oranges, etc. and made the appropriate presentations.¹⁶

Space prevents here a more complete description of the many confrontations between the Nawab and his subordinate at Madras, but there is a pattern which can be summarized: The Nawab would camp near Madras and demand a large tribute, and the English would refuse, short of insult. The Nawab would apply pressure by blockading the fort, and the British would respond by making gifts of money (once 20,000 rupees in 1702¹⁷), China oranges, pens, gold chains and especially liquor.

We may illustrate this scenario by describing one particularly interesting confrontation that occurred in 1705.¹⁸ The Nawab Dawood Khan was engaged in a military campaign, and the Agency at Fort St. David feared he would demand tribute from them. The Agency contacted Fort St. George and was instructed by the Council at Madras to give him no more than 500 pagodas and liquor, and to dissuade

13 *Ibid.*, p. 245.

14 H. D. Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, (4 vols.), (London : 1913), II, p. 286.

15 Wheeler, I, p. 282.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 281.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 405.

18 Wheeler, II, pp. 44 ff.

him from coming to St. Thome. The Nawab, however, did encamp at St. Thome with a small force and expressed a desire to dine with the Governor. The Governor's envoys were presented with emerald rings worth 30-40 pagodas apiece, and the Governor himself was sent a ring valued at 150 pagodas. The Nawab asked for a dinner invitation, and Governor Pitt replied that he was welcome if he brought only 20 of his men. When this condition was communicated to the Nawab, he appeared to ignore it and rode up to the garden with no less than 200 horsemen. Pitt refused to admit him, and the Nawab, indignant at first, sat down and ordered the dinner to be served there in the garden. He ate and drank enormously and returned to St. Thome.

These confrontations between the Company and the Nawab demonstrate that relations between them conformed to the tributary-center model, and that because the Company was largely dependent on the local resource base, it was in a dependent position. The above narrative clearly shows how the exchange of gifts and protocol, rather than permanent bureaucratic procedures, defined political relations. Raising the tribute of the grant was just a tactic by the center to obtain more gifts and honors. The effect of Company dependence on local resources is evidenced in a confrontation between the Maratha ruler of Ginjee and the Agency at St. David that resulted in a small war which ended when the British agreed to pay a tribute of 16,600 pagodas for villages in the area. What is significant is that the decision to sue for peace was based on the calculation that the maintenance of the war cost the Company 4,000 pagodas a month.¹⁹ At that point the English did not have the resource base to support their military and political policies in defence and aggrandizement of their trade.

In fact the blockades by Lingappa and the Nawab reveal that the English had little control over land outside the five square mile strip on the coast. In this respect they were no different from their counterparts, the poligars of the 18th century and the earlier Nayak period. In 1717 the Nawab claimed five villages outside the fort (first granted to the Company in 1708) and Divi Island off Masulipatam and sent armies to take them back.²⁰ The Company was able to defend its villages adjacent to the fort, but not a settlement outside that area, and Divi was taken by the Mughal.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

²⁰ Love, II, p. 141; H. H. Dodwell (ed.), *The Private Letter Books of Joseph Collett* (New York: 1933), note p. 169.

Securely huddled in their coastal enclave and tied to foreign trade by the sea, the English at Madras had a certain leverage within their tributary role with the Mughal. But to carry on and expand their trade they were required to utilize a network of economic linkages with the interior, beyond the pale of their political, and, then, military control. This commercial expansion involved the Company in the problem of the dislocation of the social-economic base from the political superstructure in India first noted by Marx. Indeed the Directors of the Company themselves were aware that the possession of political power, in the forms of phirmands (grants) did not mean possession of economic power, "instead of multiplying the European agents in India, natives, and especially Armenians, should be employed because . . . [they] could vend English woollens better than any agents of the Company could effect, under any phirmaund or grant which might be eventually purchased."²¹ However, the Company somehow thought they could, or wished they could, stand on the superstructure and control the base, without actually involving themselves in the intricacies of the land and kinship systems of that base. They wished to stand aloof at the end of the flow of goods, toss them onto a ship, and retain their independent and therefore manipulative position in the system. Yet, as we have seen above, they were inevitably and relentlessly sucked into the network of traditional politics.

Thus although the Company tried to bureaucratize their economic links with native merchants by establishing the position of Chief Merchant, this liaison soon became the nexus of gift exchange and protocol, where the "sambandam" was created. The first Chief Merchant, Casa Verona, was given a concession on the tax on goods entering the Company's territory.²² In turn Verona intrigued through Lingappa to improve the Company's status at Golconda and distributed gifts to him from the Governor.²³

The Company attempted to avoid such leaks in their bureaucratic compartments by leasing out their possessions to local elites, but their ultimate dependence on the local tax base and thereby on the Nawab resulted in a system of sambandam, not water-tight categories obedient to a code of procedure. An indication of how this sambandam

21 R. Mukherjee, *The Rise and Fall of the East India Company, A Sociological Appraisal* (New York : 1974), p. 239.

22 Wheeler, II, p. 313.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 111 ff.

operated is found in two interesting letters, one written by L. Sullivan to his son who was about to leave for India and the other from the Nawab Ali Muhammad to his son²⁴ Both letters contain advice to treat the other party as a member in this sambandam. The Nawab writes, "The English must love us . . . If there is any deviation, that person will not be a good member of his group." Despite the dharmic overtones, this is a clear expression of the binding nature of the sambandam—each had a role to play and must treat the other with respect.

Thus, while the relations between the Nawab and the Company were antagonistic, accumulatively they contributed to the evolution of this reciprocity, the sambandam.

II. *Transition, 1740-1762*

While historical process by definition defies rigid dating, for the sake of convenience I have selected 1740 as the beginning of the transition of the Company's role within the system from subordinate to super-ordinate and the beginning of the transition to a new role outside that system by their independent resource base.

Many writers have cited the decline of Mughal power after the death of Aurangzeb (1707) as the chief reason for British ascendancy.²⁵ My research does not confirm this theory, for the post-Aurangzeb Nawabs were no less powerful than the pre-Aurangzeb Nawabs. However, the rivalry between successor state, specifically the Maratha-Arcot conflict, a condition related to the decline of Mughal power, did contribute to the weakening of the Nawab vis-a-vis the Company.

Two events of 1740, the Maratha sweep through the Carnatic and the death of the Nawab and resultant succession problem, had immediate, significant consequences for Company-Nawab relations. First, the threat of a common enemy drew the two into a sense of shared interests. Second, the Maratha raid, which raged unabated for two years, wrecked havoc in the revenue administration from which the Nawab was never to recover. The Marathas killed the Nawab,

24 S. Muhammad Husayn Nainar (ed. and trans.) *Tuzaki-i-Walta-jahi of Burhan Ibn Hasan*, 2nd pt., Madras University Islamic Series, No. 4 *Sources of the History of the Carnatic*, II (Madras : 1934), p. 51; P. J. Marshall, *Problems of Empire, Britain and India, 1757-1813* (London : 1968), pp 108-110.

25 See note No. 1 above.

ransomed his son for 100,000 rupees and captured his son-in-law. This created a power vacuum and set the stage for the civil war between the son, Muhammad Ali, and son-in-law, Chandra Sahib, which eventually brought the English and French into conflict. Third, the Poona raids forced the scanty military fortifications at Fort St. George to be built up by frightened Britishers. In the years before 1740, the fort had rarely held over 100 soldiers.²⁶

Regarding the first of these consequences, previous to 1740 the Nawabs had come to Madras as superior lords demanding tribute, backed by full regalia and symbols of authority. Now, frightened by a mighty enemy, they came seeking safety in what must have seemed a serene, regulated coastal colony, secure from the ravages of the open plains. Earlier in the 1730s, while tiring of the demands of kingship, the Nawab had come to stay outside Pondicherry, preferring this spot's tranquility. Also in 1735, Ali and Chandra Sahib were honored by the British with gifts near St. Thome, but at these times they had come as lords, not as scared suppliant's.

Later, amid the confusion of the succession struggle, the Nawab sent his family to Madras because he feared for his life at the hands of the Nizam who still held nominal control over the Carnatic. The Council found housing for them, and in 1741 the Nawab himself came to stay. He was elegantly received at a big durbar, received presents and caused quite a stir among European society there.²⁷

The importance of Madras as sanctuary is evident from the fact that when one of the young Nawabs was killed by a rebellious poligar at Vellore, the coronation of the new Nawab was held in *Madras* at a ceremony in the garden house.²⁸ The Company quickly seized the opportunity to get a quick confirmation for the five outlying villages and the privilege of minting their own pagodas and rupees in Madras. Later, too, during the siege of Madras (1747) Muhammad Ali sought refuge within the walls of the British colony which induced him subsequently to request a permanent residence there. The Company openly expressed its opinion at that time that it was wise to encourage such dependence on their strength.²⁹ Paradoxically then, by virtue of

26 H. M. Vibart, *A Military History of the Madras Engineers and Pioneers from 1743 up to the Present Time* (London : 1881), p. 3.

27 Love, II, p. 281

28 *Ibid.*, p. 609.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 610.

the fact that they only controlled a small amount of territory, the Company was able to function as a benefactor to the Nawab.

Although the events of the 1740s contributed to the reversal of the roles for the British and Nawab within the traditional system, they did not alter the structure of that tributary system. The Company continued to play the tributary role with the Marathas and obtained new cowles from them for Forts St. George and St. David. Even after they departed and the Nizam descended onto the Carnatic, the Governor sent him 13,000 pagodas all the way to Trichinopoly as a strategem for gaining confirmation for the five outlying villages.³¹

Rather, it remained for the French-Anglo wars in collusion with the Carnatic civil war to establish the material conditions that produced the completion of the reversal of roles within the system and eventually the structural change that resulted in British conquest.

The strength of the tributary system is demonstrated by the fact that when the French-Anglo wars reached the Coromandel, both parties appealed to the Nawab for aid as feuding tributaries to the imperial center. Moreover, the British defended their role in the civil war as aid to the legitimate claimant to the nawabship (this is a case of rationalization for Muhammad Ali was clearly the usurper).³² Yet, the reality of the war forced a change in this relationship.

Significantly, Ali's first real contact with the British came when he fielded one of his father's (the then Nawab) two armies sent to aid the British in the defense of Ft. St. David (1746).³³ In this case the Company had applied to the Nawab to furnish troops; he agreed, stipulating that the Company must finance the expedition. Here we see the inverse of the relationship that was later to obtain in which the Nawab paid for the English troops propelling him into a debt from which he was never to extricate himself. Thus the relationship had evolved from the tributary system into one of allies, the one aiding the other, eventuating in the superiority of the British.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 280.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 285.

32 Dodwell, *Cambridge*, p. 132

33 James Macpherson, *The History and Management of the East-India Company from its Origin in 1600 to the Present Times* (London : 1779), p. 64.

One of the main reasons for this shift was the nature of the local resource base. Devastated by the 1740-raids and the civil war which encouraged many small killedars (a minor mansubdhar in the south) and poligars to withhold tribute, the tax collection apparatus was severely dislocated by 1750. It must be noted that the Nawabship of the Carnatic had only been in existence some 50 years by this date and had yet to extend its authority over a large portion of the Carnatic (from the Gundalakama river, in northern Guntur Dt., to Kanya Kumari), including Tinnevelly, Madurai, Tanjore, Ramnad and Trichinopoly districts (the later not until 1736). Hence it is not surprising that the Nawab's alien Islamic political apparatus was not well linked to local resource bases in such a brief period of time and was easily dismantled.

Therefore the Nawab found it difficult to extract the necessary tax for the maintenance of empire and warfare in its defense, and he was forced to undertake frequent raiding expeditions. Many of these early raids, as we have seen, were directed against his most wealthy tributary, the British in Madras. Later the British were again involved in the Nawab's tax raids, but this time as allies in his expeditions against Nellore, certain forts near Arcot and twice to Madurai.³⁴

Another manifestation of the shifting power balance between the allies which derived from the nature of the local resource base was that the Company was able to exact large land assignments from the Nawab in return for their aid. In 1755 they agreed to march against the Arcot poligars only if they were granted two areas (Ponneri and Pedipatti, weaving centers, valued at 30,000 pagodas per year) and advance orders for 800,000 rupees worth of local rent.³⁵ The Nawab was insulted at this inroad on his authority, but consented.

One example was the acquisition of the Poonamalle country which had been a source of trouble to the Company for 70 years. Muhammad Ali first bribed the Company in 1745 by offering to grant it to the Company when he became Nawab, in return for aid against Chandra Sahib.³⁶ Muhammad Ali had not been formally confirmed as the

34 H. Dodwell, *Clive and Duplex, The Beginning of Empire* (London : 1967), pp. 57, 159; C. S. Srinivasachari, Ananda Ranga Pillai, *The Pepys of French India* (Madras : 1940), p. 355.

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Ibid.*, p. 181.

Nawab and thus needed the approval of the Nizam to make this promise of a grant. This he requested, but the Nizam was disgusted with the Europeans and ordered him to break all relations with them. Muhammad Ali bribed the Brahmin minister in Golconda, and the order was rescinded.³⁷

Four years later after he was decisively beaten at Ambur, Muhammad Ali again requested the Company's aid and offered Poonamalle in return.³⁸ Again he asked for the Nizam's permission and again was refused. And again his diplomacy was successful, and the Company supplied troops forcing the Nawab to pay all the expenses and cede to it two strategic forts.

While the Nawab was busy signing away his diminishing tax base and falling into enormous debt, he was still able to maintain the facade of kingship. His consignment of land revenues may well have served only to confirm, in his own mind, the dependent status of the Company. Indeed, the confirmation of Muhammad Ali as Nawab by the Nizam (1751), attended by Company servants bearing gifts, would certainly have strengthened that perception.³⁹ The depth of the Nawab's need to maintain this self-image is revealed by the fact that even when he realized he was no longer in control, he continued to play a royal role. He declared as early as 1751, "I am no longer master of my actions".⁴⁰ Yet, in 1762, when the British conferred a title upon him in a treaty, he quickly responded by granting them a jaghir (subsequently known as the "Company's jaghir"), performing the role of king as donor. Strangely enough, as we shall see, although such land consignments to the Company were an indication of his inferior position, they also created a debtor-creditor sambandam by means of which Muhammad Ali was able to wield influence over the Company in his waning days. The traditional role of land grantor expressed itself through the sambandam system to yield influence for the sovereign.

The British, too, were careful to play their role correctly, for only through alliances with local elites could they hope to extract

37 Nainar, p. 42.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

39 *Ibid.*

40 G. B. Malleson, *History of the French in India* (Edinburgh . 1909), p. 343.

what little they did. The *Records of Fort St. George* are replete with instances in which the British show concern not to disregard local custom, for fear it would prejudice commerce.⁴¹ Interestingly, when the British regained Madras in 1749, the event was celebrated by the returning merchant families and Company servants in indigenous ceremonial terms with a puja done by Brahmins, animal sacrifices, etc.⁴² Even in formal negotiations with the French at Sadras in 1754, the British vouched their claims as a tributary to one party in the Mughal succession dispute and based them on Islamic documents.⁴³

However, by 1750 such a role was a pretense for the English as the following excerpt from a letter, sent by the Directors in London to Madras, makes clear, "It is certain that the Nawab's existence as such depends on the strength of the Company, he is too sensible not to feel this . . . It is necessary that a respectful decency should be observed in all your negotiations with him, but at the same time, it is just and proper that in such a case (Tanjore) you should show a firmness becoming the power you represent."⁴⁴ (Parentheses added.)

By the early 1760s when the English had eliminated their European rival, the reversal of the roles of the Nawab and the Company was clear. Muhammad Ali had won in his battle for the Nawabship, but so great was the British assistance that he became their insolvent debtor for ever. The expense of the war had resulted in territorial expansion for the Company and debts for the Nawab, and here was the irony. The Nawab remained the nominal sovereign contracting his dependent poligar for military aid, but as he had no revenues, he was in total arrears to his tributary. By this time the war-boom economy of Madras and the incipient industrial revolution in England and eastern trade had provided the British with a superior resource base, and one exterior to India, that allowed them to supply aid to the Nawab far in excess of what he could afford.

41 See, for example, *Records of Ft. St. George, Letters from Ft. St. George, 1754* (Madras : 1934), p. 66.

42 C. S. Srinivasachari, "The Historical Material in the Private Diary of Ananga Ranga Pillai, (1736-1761)," *Journal of Indian History* IX (1930), p. 337.

43 Dodwell, *Cambridge*, p. 132.

44 B. S. Baliga, "British Relations with the Nawabs and Princes of Arcot," in Baliga, *Studies in Madras Administration* (2 vols.), I, (Madras : 1960), p. 314.

While the complexities of the Nawab's debts cannot be adequately discussed here,⁴⁵ we can indicate its extent by some statistics. His account with the Company which began, I believe, in 1754 under the title "Trichy Expedition" soon skyrocketed to 2,525,375 pagodas by 1761.⁴⁶ In addition, his private debts at that time totaled 2,229,650 pagodas. Paradoxically, as a result of contracting such huge debts he came to control a large percentage of the private and Company capital in the Madras Presidency.

The Nawab's creditors, many of them high Company servants and Council members, formed an interest group which wielded great power in Madras until the end of the 18th century. Specifically they desired that the Nawab remain a king distributing his land revenues, distributing them to themselves so that they could recover through that revenue what they had lent him during the wars and afterward. We can illustrate the involuted nature of this sambandam by a simple example. When the Nawab granted the Company jaghir in payment for part of his debt, the tax revenues were then leased back to the Nawab.⁴⁷ His creditors lobbied in the Council to rent back the jaghir to the Nawab in order that they would receive the tax which would have otherwise been credited to the Company's account. As we shall see shortly, the Council coup d'etat of 1776, or Tanjore Affair, was a result of this very problem.

These debts created an Arcot-Company collusion, debtor-creditor relationship, structurally congruent with the sovereign-tributary relationship. And it was essentially a sambandam because the interest of the debtor becomes necessarily the interest of the creditor. This coalescence of interests (characteristic of the sambandam system) was later challenged by a new group of interests (representing a new system) in the Tanjore Affair. We must turn now to a description of the origin and nature of this new system.

45 See J. D. Gurney, *The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot*, Ph.D. (Oxford : 1973) for a complete account (unavailable to me) and L. S. Sutherland, *The East Indian Company in 18th Century Politics* (Oxford : 1952), pp. 323 ff. Richard Barnett, *Regional Politics in a Mughal Successor : Awadh, 1720-1785*, Ph.D. (Univ. of California : 1975), suggests that the British used the role of creditor as a deliberate policy to effect control, but such is not the case in the Carnatic because the creditors were private individuals who were interested solely in profits.

46 R. Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic, 1701-1801* (Tirupati : 1966), p. 54.

47 Dodwell, *Cambridge*, p. 274.

III. *The New System, 1762 and After*

After the defeat of the French in 1761, two treaties were signed which embody some of the new structural changes in the Indian-British political system. The first (1762) was tripartite between the Nawab, Tanjore, and the Company, but was in fact orchestrated by the Company. Macpherson, a contemporary and friend of then Governor Pigot, writes that the Nawab refused to sign the treaty, so subversive of his interests was it, and that Governor Pigot seized the Nawab's stamp and signed it himself.⁴⁸ Specifically, the treaty established the Company as the arbitrator between the Nawab and his tributary, the Raja of Tanjore, and set up a British Resident in Tanjore.⁴⁹ What is important to the present argument is that the treaty regularized the Raja's tribute to the Nawab, substituting a bureaucratic document for the plunder raids. The intent here was to thus recover some of the Nawab's debts via this bureaucratic procedure.

The second treaty, the Treaty of Paris (1763), was the peace agreement between the French and British and confirmed Muhammad Ali as the Nawab and named him as ally to the victors. Interestingly, this European confirmation of Ali predates the Mughal recognition from Delhi by two years and indicates the degree of power held by Europeans over native rulers.

The political changes which these documents encoded were based upon similar changes in the social and economic structure that had their genesis in the 1740s. The war years (1744-1761) produced a tremendous economic boom and a new class of British subjects in Madras. From 1700-1750 Eastern trade more than doubled for the Company, and in Madras the years 1767-1801 (there are no figures for earlier years) showed a tripling of revenue.⁵⁰ This represents the superior resource base from which the structural change derives. Let us see how this change manifested itself in the Colony.

This independent base allowed the Company, whom we said had to trade in alliance with local merchants in the early decades of the century, to control economic relationships more thorough. The

48 Macpherson, p. 127.

49 Rajayyan, *A History of British Diplomacy in Tanjore*, pp. 49-53.

50 W. J. Barber, *British Economic Thought and India, 1600-1858* (Oxford : 1975), p. 68; Mukherjee, p. 374.

decline of native merchants has been described elsewhere,⁵¹ but we can look at a contrast that illuminates something of the changes in Madras. If Casa Verona, as Chief Merchant, characterized the earlier period, then Lingi Chetty may be said to characterize this latter period. The latter carried on an extensive trade with the Company in broadcloth (approx. Rs. 100,000 annually) and arrack sales.⁵² He was also a frequent renter of Company lands consigned by the Nawab : in 1749 he won the auction for the cowle of Tiruvat-tiyar in 1750 Poonamalle, and Devicottah in 1757.⁵³ However, his trade with the Company was terminated in 1753 because he refused to comply with new cloth requirements, and his contract was assigned to another merchant.⁵⁴ The sambandam was being subjected to new bureaucratic rigor.

In general, more and more of the trade was directed from Madras, for as Das Gupta notes, the war destroyed much of the coastal trade except that which had a foothold in the British enclave.⁵⁵ Politically, too, Madras came to occupy a new status. The palace which Muhammad Ali had built near Chepauk outside Madras in 1767 was far more splendid than the old palace on the plains in the dusty town of Arcot and heralded the transfer of the capital of South India from the Mughal capital to the British to the British trade town.

We have mentioned above that when the merchant families returned to Madras in 1749 they celebrated with a traditional puja, but already the social composition of the city had changed. First there is the sheer increase in the numbers of Europeans in the city. Spear notes an increase from 168 Europeans (plus one company of soldiers) to 2,500 soldiers alone between 1740-1769.⁵⁶ There was a qualitative change as well. Prior to 1740 the military force was essentially comprised of merchants cum soldiers. After that date a new soldier was sent by the Crown, one who brought a more disciplined,

51 See Ashin Das Gupta "Trade and Politics in 18th Century India in D. S. Richards (ed.) *Islam and the Trade of Asia : A Colloquium* (Oxford : 1970), pp. 181-213.

52 *Records of Ft. St. George, Letters from Ft. St. George, 1757*, p. 8

53 *Ibid.*, Letters from Ft. St. David, 1749. p. 53 ; *Ibid.*, 1757, p. 31.

54 Baliga, p. 362.

55 Das Gupta, p. 206.

56 Percival Spear, *The Nabobs, A Study of the Social Life of the English in Eighteenth Century India* (London : 1963), pp. 29-30.

efficient, officer-like tone to the military. After 1750 the military had a status superior to that of the Company, a harbinger of the Crown's eventual dominance over the Company.

The class divisions between the old guard and the new were so severe that the new elite demanded sepoys recruited in India to show a certificate proving they were not sons of natives.⁵⁷ Yet the new disciplined look of the military soon succumbed, to a degree, to the wiles of the Indian system. The Batta system, of field pay, became a convenient way for officers to make extra money by requesting an amount of Batta and paying something less. Because the troops were usually in the Nawab's pay, the qualities of the sambandam relationship crept in. For example, one wounded officer was given a village as compensation by the Nawab.⁵⁸

The second new class of Britishers who entered Madras after the outbreak of war was mercantile. The early Company servants in India were really adventurers cum merchants who engaged in trade to support their life of adventure. Even the leading merchants were individuals who played their role as merchant on an ad hoc basis,⁵⁹ who became rooted in traditional sambandam connections with their Indian counterparts.

The new mercantile class was more entrepreneurial, more regularized and formed permanent trading houses in contrast to the ad hoc arrangements of the earlier group. Allied with the new officer class, the new merchants were able to monopolize trade and ruin some of the old established families. Among those ruined were some Portuguese families who were unjustly accused of collusion with their fellow Catholic French.⁶⁰ Lastly, the first banks (and insurance companies) were established in this period.⁶¹

Thus the old guard, both native and European, gave way to a new convergence of interests—the new officers, financeers and civilian bureaucrats brought over to administer the newly acquired territories (e.g. the Northern Circars in 1765). The old elite were culturally

57 Henry Dodwell, *The Nabobs of Madras* (London : 1926), p. 42-3.

58 *Ibid.*

59 *Ibid.*, p. 126-7.

60 *Ibid.*

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 139-41.

Indianized and had acquired their social status in India of Indian terms, within the Indian system. Thus, they owed little allegiance, or even respect, to London as their profits were made largely outside the Company's purview. By contrast, the new elite were thoroughly British in orientation and came to India with a status defined in English society. They came to the Orient to serve the Company, make some money and then go home.

Gurney has reported a similar change in those men who served as advisors to the Nawab.⁶² The early group, people like Paterson and Boswall, had their roots in the Anglo-Indian society of Arcot and Madras, whereas the later group, men like Macpherson, Maclean and Benfield, were speculative, reckless adventurers. Whereas the Sambandam was an expedient for the old elite, it was only a barrier to the new. Indeed only one of them actually spent enough time in Madras to develop the sambandam connections that the earlier group had.

It is predictable then that the Nawab's contact with the later group grew directly out of the 1763 treaty, out of the bureaucratic regularization of relations which characterizes the new role of the British. Although that treaty named the Nawab as an ally of the Crown, that fact was not known to him until 1769 when John Macpherson told him.⁶³ Macpherson had arrived in India only months before and was soon deputed by the Nawab to London to present his accusation of Council interference in his government to London. Macpherson stayed on in London and the Crown sent John Lindsay, disguised as a frigate commander, to investigate.

For a time it appeared that the Nawab could play off the Council and the Crown against each other, but soon these two closed ranks on common economic interest. Thus the Nawab and his creditors' conflict became one vs the new Madras elite and London (bureaucracy). One member of the second group, Joseph Sullivan, a Company servant in Madras, complained that relations with the

62 J. D. Gurney, "Fresh Light on the Character of the Nawab of Arcot," in *Statesmen, Scholars and Merchants, Essays in Eighteenth-Century History* presented to Dame Lucy Sutherland, Anne Whiteman, J. S. Bromley, and P. G. M. Dickson (eds.) (Oxford, 1973), pp. 229-30.

63 Wilks, II, p. 212.

64 Richard Joseph Sullivan, *An Analysis of the Political History of India* (London: 1779), p. 101.

Nawab had never regulated and that therefore the Company was always at his "mercy": His description of Indian politics articulates the new mentality: "... the entanglements of Indian politics are great because in general they are but temporary, and rarely have an object permanent in view" ⁶⁴ What Sullivan meant of course, was that the sambandam system was too amorphous, too inexact, and too ad hoc for the new civil servant.

IV. *Tanjore Affair, 1771-1776*

Before discussing how the sambandam and bureaucratic system clashed in the Tanjore Affair, we should return briefly to the general economic situation. The first Mysore war (1767-1769) began so immediately after the defeat of the French (1761) that the war boom begun in the Carnatic wars continued virtually until the end of the century. Thus the social and economic changes noted above only accelerated. The wars cost the Nawab a great deal and pushed him into debt even beyond the point of being able to maintain the appearance of sovereignty. He consequently turned his attention to prosperous Tanjore. In 1769 he first asked the Council for permission, as he had formerly asked the Nizam, to reduce the kingdom, but was refused. ⁶⁵ Two years later, however, he gained that permission, after first promising to finance the expedition and presenting a gift of 35,000 rupees to the Governor. The combined forces of the Nawab and the Company forced Tanjore to sign a treaty giving the Nawab more tribute and land.

Again in 1773, the Nawab bought the Council's complicity for 10,000 rupees and conducted another raid, directed by English officers. In effect, Arcot annexed the wealthy kingdom and imprisoned the King. Yet, this was in effect a tax raid carried out by the new power in Madras, for in the same year British forces continued into Ramnad and Sivaganga to collect taxes.

The Court of Directors in London soon realized that, strengthened by the Lindsay mission, the Nawab had maneuvered into a position of potential power and control of the Tanjore revenues. Thus Lord Pigot, known to be touch with the Nawab, was sent to relieve Governor

⁶⁵ Rajayyan, *A History* pp. 54-5. The account of Ali's expedition against Tanjore is detailed in his article, "Muhammad Ali's Conquest of Tanjore and After," *Journal of the Saraswathi Mahal Library*, 18:3 (1965), pp. 1-12.

Wynch, who had been bribed by the Nawab, and restore the deposed king to the throne. This end was effected in 1776, but the Nawab and his creditors retaliated with an astonishing show of control and daring. They staged a coup, imprisoned Pigot and ran the Council themselves.⁶⁶ London was equally swift in response, recalling and fining the rebellious council members.

The central question, of course, was whether the Nawab and his creditors could manipulate politics in Madras to protect their financial interests or whether the new bureaucracy, backed by London, could assert its formal control over the ambiguous sambandam system. As we have seen, the Nawab was forced to consign land revenues to private individuals as security for loans from them which he needed to wage his wars. The restoration of the Tanjore king by the Council simply meant that the financial investments of these creditors were cut off, to the tune of £ 400, 000.⁶⁷

Perhaps the most important creditor was Paul Benfield who became known as the "banker of the Carnatic", so large were his accounts with the Nawab.⁶⁸ He was a man who became the subject of heated debates in Parliament in the late 18th century and the target of Burke's villifying speeches. The man who was later known as "Count Rupee" first came to Madras in 1764 and was Civil Architect in Black Town in 1769. From this position he made contracts with the Nawab concerning the construction of barracks and other military buildings during the wars. He amassed a small fortune, enabling him to extend huge loans to the Nawab. The Court of Directors investigated him in 1777 and found that the Committee of Works had credited him 20,060,000 pagodas.⁶⁹

Benfield's involvement with the Nawab came to light when Pigot ordered the restoration in 1776. Benfield immediately filed claim for 23,000,000 rupees which had been assigned him in Tanjore by the Nawab, and for £ 72,000 lent to individuals within Tanjore.⁷⁰ More-

66 See Rajayyan, *A History*, pp. 78-9.

67 Mukherjee, p. 369.

68 Nowhere is Benfield's biography compiled, so far as I know, but see Lucy Sutherland, *East India Company*, p. 318 ff.

69 W. J. Wilson, *History of the Madras Army*, 2 vols. (Madras : 1882), 1, p. 339.

70 Mukherjee, p. 370.

over, the financial resources of the Madras creditors directly controlled the taking of Tanjore because one of its members, Macpherson, states that the 1773 raid was supported by Madras loans.⁷¹

This intricate web of connections around the Nawab's debts has yet to be completely described, but it suffices to say that it extended from Madras to London (where the Nawab's agent, Macpherson, kept contact with Benfield's agent, Richard Atkinson) and to Bengal where Warren Hastings was anxious to retain Benfield's powerful lobby in London. Hastings intervened in the Tanjore issue on the Nawab's side and asked the Council not to assign land revenues to the government that had already been granted to servants of the Company who were the Nawab's creditors.⁷²

But, in the end, the group of "European Poligars" attached to the Nawab and his system of land grants and sambandam lost this struggle for control of the newly won dominions and the Crown asserted at least a modicum of bureaucratic control.

The financial motivations of the creditors should be clear, but what of the "bureaucratic" motivations of the new system? After the defeat of the French and the acquisition of the Northern Circars, London was faced with the problem of how to administer her lands. The year 1773 marked the passage of the Regulating Act which attempted to institute some new bureaucracy machinery by creating the Supreme Council in Calcutta. Obviously, the monied manipulations of its servants, in collusion with a native monarch could not be tolerated. Aside from the need to avoid a siphoning off of the rich tax base in Tanjore to Count Rupee, it was imperative to assert the authority of the new regime to propagate a new ideology. Therefore, immediately upon Pigot's arrival in Madras, he dismissed Macpherson for disloyalty.⁷³ Secondly, he was empowered to limit access of the Company's servants to the Nawab. One consequence of this policy was the demise of certain merchants, e.g. Charles Darke who was refused a trade permit because he was too close to the durbār of the Mughal.⁷⁴ Not all fared so poorly; Asiaticus, in his memoirs, des-

71 Macpherson, note p. 267.

72 A. P. Das Gupta, *The Central Authority in British India, 1774-1784* (Calcutta : 1931), pp. 43-4.

73 Sutherland, p. 317. Also the Nawab had established direct relations with the Dutch, Danes and French (Rajayyan, *A History*, pp. 69-70).

74 Dodwell, *The Nabos*, pp. 136-7.

65 4843

125627

cribes how he was in the employ of the Nawab and, when Pigot ordered all Company servants to abandon their ties with native rulers, preferred that service because it was more profitable than the company's pay.

The resolution of the Tanjore Affair, perhaps more than anything else, reveals the importance of the new mentality and the new structural position of the British. If the Nawab and his clique were able to stage, successfully, a coup, how was order actually restored? *The Cambridge History of India* says matter-of-factly, "... the guilty members were recalled and tried before the Court of King's Bench, their punishment was limited to fines of £ 1,000 each."⁷⁶ Benfield was also recalled, returned in 1781, and recalled again in 1788.⁷⁷ Obviously there was an allegiance to the authority of the Crown that had been absent before. The efficacy of this authority partly derived from its location outside India, uncompromised by the sambandam system.

V. *After Tanjore, 1776-*

The resolution of the Tanjore Affair did not, of course, eliminate the conflict between Sambandam and bureaucratic systems because it was only a manifestation of that structural antagonism. The next Governor, Thomas Rumbold, became caught in precisely that opposition between sambandam and bureaucracy. He bypassed the new administrative machinery when he had to deal with the very matter with which it could not—tax revenue. Rumbold suspended the Committee of Circuit, a quasi-revenue regulating board, and invited the Zamindars of the Northern Circars to Madras directly to settle their accounts.⁷⁸ Although he had requested them not to make lavish arrangements, they arrived in ceremonial pomp and made expensive presentations to the new imperial power in Madras. Mr. Rumbold was later found to have "saved" some £ 164,000 and was sent home.⁷⁹ Also, a Mr. Redhead, Secretary to Rumbold,

⁷⁵ Philip Dormer Stanhope (ed.), *Genuine Memoirs of Asiaticus* (London : 1784), p. 115.

⁷⁶ p. 280.

⁷⁷ P. E. Roberts, *India Under Wellesley* (London : 1929), p. 87.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Ann Rumbold, *Vindication of the Character and Administration of Sir Thomas Rumbold* (London : 1868), p. 50.

⁷⁹ Mukherjee, p. 374.

received a large sum from a Zamindar and in return appointed him Diwani of the northern Zamindars and allowed him to annex an area adjacent to his own.⁸⁰

Rumbold's case is an instructive one because he repudiated so immediately the new ideology which triumphed in the Tanjore Affair. It is difficult to determine whether his actions were motivated by self-interest or a correct understanding of the old political system. He told the Directors that the poligars were not "renters", but owners of the land over historical millenia, and that they paid not "rent", but tribute to the Mughals and should do the same with the Company. Perhaps his subsequent dismissal was based as much on this justification of sambandam as on his alleged mismanagement of funds.

The person of Nawab Muhammad Ali is a separate subject, but some comments do relate to the thesis of this paper. Despite his fondness for European liquor (Madeira wine) and China oranges, he was an orthodox Muslim who lamented to Allah when he was forced to bribe in order to rescind the Nizam's order not to deal with the white men.⁸¹ Although he could bargain skillfully with the British, his style of kingship was casual and irregular.⁸² Once, Paterson, his diarist, reported he was discussing military affairs with his advisors and simply said, "'Come my four friends, . . . sit down and settle this business for me'"⁸³ As for his sense of sambandam, Boswall describes his fickleness, "'No, says he, I never will; I'll sooner give the flesh off my bones', Yet he agreed to it. The people here come to him and talk him over, and ask it as a favour, then he gives it."⁸⁴

The traditional way of life and politics, and the Indian concept of kingship, were deeply ingrained in the Nawab. He only spoke a smattering of English and never lost his Islamic roots. Even in the last decades of the century when he had lost all power, he continued to demand the symbols of authority and to perform the role of munificent sovereign. For example, he continued to receive the first ear of corn, the orthodox symbol of overlordship, from Tanjore long

80 Rumbold, pp. 61-3

81 Nainar, note p. 51.

82 Gurney, "Fresh Light . . ." p. 226-7.

83 *Ibid.*, p. 229

84 *Ibid.*, p. 227

after he lost any semblance of actual authority over that territory.⁸⁵ There could be no finer portrait of the king qua king than that drawn by one of Muhammad Ali's diarists of the monarch on the seashore :

There we saw about 300 of these fellows, all ready to go on board. In a small choultry, there were about twenty or thirty Arabs, who had come from Mecca last year, and were to return; all these came up to the Nabob, kissed his hands and put them at the same time to their eyes. His Highness then sat down upon a step at the edge of the choultry, and with great patience received the rupees by the handful (about 20 or 30 at a time) from his mootasadies (accountants), and gave to each of the faquiers who were going, some more, some less, according to their rank and station. It was now about 11a.m., and he said it would last perhaps to 4 o'clock in the afternoon.⁸⁶

Conclusion

The question posed at the beginning of this paper was this: did the British effect the conquest of South India by functioning in traditional roles within the indigenous political system or by adopting a new role outside of it. The research assembled here supports the latter alternative. Only when the British were able to function in a new role, i.e. of a non-Indian resource based power, were they capable of extending military and political domination. Until that time the data amply demonstrates that they operated very much like a traditional tributary to the court of the Muslim empires.

More specifically two changes consequent upon the acquisition of this external resource base have been outlined. The first was a change in role within the indigenous system. The British began to act as the superior power, while carefully preserving the appearances of the legitimacy of the Nawab, through whom they intended to recover their investments and to collect revenues. The second and more crucial, was a structural change. The economics of eastern trade allowed the Company, who could never rule while dependent

85 Rajayyan, *A History*, p. 81

86 Gurney, "Fresh Light . . .", p. 241.

exclusively on Indian resources, to extend political and military control over the south.⁸⁷ The external location of this resource meant that the British were not obliged to trade favours for favours in the zero sum total system of traditional politics in India. Further, the external location of the authority underpinning that economic power proved a decisive factor in the assertion of the new system's victory over the old in the Tanjore Affair.

However, as the Rumbold case shows, the political and military domination of the south did not mean economic control. Paradoxically, the weakness of the British conquest lay, as did its strength, in the fact that it was made possible by an economic base + political authority that were external. Indeed, this is nothing more than a confirmation of Marx's analysis of India which pointed out the discontinuity of the political superstructure from the economic base.⁸⁸ The "right handed-ness" of South Indian economic networks, ingrown by the centuries of ties of kin and territory, despite the frequent seizure of political power, are virtually impenetrable to the outsider.

This suggests that the "chaos", which many have forwarded as the reason for British conquest in the 18th century, was primarily political and military. Although there were undoubtedly changes in economic relations, these developed mostly on the coast, and there is evidence that the flow of goods was relatively uninterrupted.⁸⁹ As Romila Tharpar has said, there was not so much a "break-down" as a "break-up."⁹⁰

Moreover, this discontinuity between economic and political power in India was exacerbated by the British conquest. Previously, political power, because it was dependent on the local resource base, had to adjust to Parochial demands through the sambandam system. In an effort to remove their political authority so far from local economic systems that they little understood, the British created greater tension.

87 For a discussion of the effects of Eastern trade see Barber, pp. 68 ff.

88 As noted in Eric Stokes, "The 1st Century of British Colonial Rule in India : Social Revolution or Social Stagnation," *Past and Present* 58 (1973), p. 136-7.

89 Romila Tharpar, "Summary of the Discussion," in Prasad (ed.) *Ideas in History*, Proceedings of a Seminar, p. 329.

90 *Ibid.*

91 This tension between political and economic power, between the Sambandam and bureaucratic systems, is well described by J. C. Heesterman, "India and the Inner Conflict of Tradition." *Daedalus* (Winter 1973), pp. 107-8.

THE PERMANENT SETTLEMENT IN BENGAL AND THE BREAK-UP OF THE ZAMINDARI OF DINAJPUR*

SHINKICHI TANIGUCHI

There would be no doubt that the Permanent Settlement of Bengal in 1793 marked an epoch in the history of colonial India. However, in comparison with its importance, the present standard of our knowledge about it is far from satisfactory, largely because of the absence of the intensive regional study regarding its effects on the agrarian society. This paper concentrates on a select estate (Zamindari) in northern Bengal and analyses the causes of its fall at the end of the eighteenth century, the social origins of the new zamindars who bought up the lots at the public auctions of this estate, and the nature of their estate management. This study as a whole aims at throwing certain light on the structural changes in the agrarian society of Bengal under the early British rule.

I. *Causes of the Break-up of the Estate of Dinajpur*

The fall of the Dinajpur estate was a result of the combined effect of various factors that were closely related to each other. The political disorder on the eve of the British rule in Bengal may be taken as the beginning of the prolonged process of this fall. The disorder led to the confusions in the management and finance of the zamindar's estate, and such confusions then brought about the decline in his local influence. When the British East India Company acquired the Diwani (authority to collect the public revenue) in 1765, its government, in view of the two main objectives of the rule, namely, the maximization of the revenue from the country and the consolidation of its power in Bengal, introduced the public farming system and

* This paper is mainly based on sections 1, 2 & 6 of chapter 4 of my Ph. D. dissertation, *Structure of Agrarian Society in Northern Bengal, 1765 to 1800*, submitted to the Calcutta University in 1977. I take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. B B Chaudhuri, whose kind supervision and encouragement enabled me to complete the dissertation.

A list of abbreviations will be seen at the end of this article.

also tried to reduce the zamindar's military establishments. Consequently the above-mentioned confusions and decline further deepened. The accumulation of the insolvent debts, which eventually ruined the zamindar of Dinajpur, was a corollary to such developments.

As it is beyond the limit of this paper to discuss all of these factors in full detail, we shall only give brief accounts of some.¹

We shall, firstly, trace the gradual decline of the zamindar's local influence, which was the basis of his control over the country and people, under the early British rule.

In 1770, G. Vansittart, the first supervisor of the Dinajpur district, started the direct administration of this region, and found that the zamindar's local servants (chaudhurs) were made the instrument of his intrigue to reduce the ostensible assets of his estate. Vansittart thus argued in favour of adopting "the system of farming for a term of years" as the "only method of putting a final stop to the abuses of the officers of Parganas."² In the next year, H. Cottrell, the second supervisor, also reported: "I mean...to point out to you the undue influence he [the zamindar] has and must still maintain in spite of all endeavours to the contrary, so long as his officers continue to make the collections... [he is] able to conceal the frauds his officers commit for his private benefit beyond all possibility of recovery."³

Thus the zamindar's local influence was considered the great obstacle in the way of maximization of the revenue from the country. The Council of Revenue at Murshidabad, therefore, unanimously agreed on the introduction of the public farming system and on the reduction of the elaborate establishments of the estate.⁴

Vansittart started the process of retrenchment. He reduced the expenses of the zamindar's central officers from Sa. Rs. 21,818 to Sa. Rs. 18,529 and those of local officers from Sa. Rs. 51,785 to Sa. Rs. 32,738.⁵ He further made reduction in the establishments of the landservants who were given the rent-free service lands (chakran lands) as follows.

1 For the fuller discussion on these factors, see Part I (chapters one to four) of my Ph. D. dissertation.

2 CCRM-P, 31st Dec. 1770.

3 *Ibid.*, 21st Jany. 1771.

4 CCR-P, 7th May 1771; CCRM-P, 2nd Nov. 1771.

5 CCRM-P, 31st Dec. 1770.

An Abstract showing the Reduction of the Land-servants as recommended by G. Vansittart

	Zamindar's Establishments before the Retrenchment		Establishments to be retained	
	persons	bights	persons	bighas
Dawks & Paiks ⁶	6,743	115,485	3,200	80,000
Barkandazes & Peons ⁷	551	14,710	400	12,000
Swars (horsemen)	266	26,478	20	2,000
	7,560	156,673	3,620	94,000

(Source) CCRM-P, 31st Dec. 1770.

Besides these, he further proposed to reduce the zamindar's central troops consisting of 77 horsemen and 464 gunmen (barkandazes) at an annual cost of Rs. 20,000, to 10 horsemen and 222 gunmen at the annual cost of Rs. 10,000. However, he did not think it proper to diminish any portion of the numerous inferior servants immediately employed in the rent collection, who were called the karmacharis and held rent-free service lands (chakran land).⁸ But it seems that he could not fully carry this plan of reduction into effect.

In 1771, J. Lawrell was deputed to the districts of Dinajpur and Rangpur on a special commission of making new settlements. In Dinajpur, he farmed out the whole estate to more than seventy small revenue contractors for the periods of one to three years and also took a drastic measure towards undermining of the zamindar's "undue influence" by dismissing all the chaudhuris, who were the zamindar's local servants in charge of the parganas (sub-divisions). He argued: "The land this year being let out to farm in parganas, there was no occasion for containing Chowdries in the Government service; they have, therefore, been all dismissed."⁹ He also reduced the number of the land-servants of all descriptions including the inferior rent

6 Dawk : An establishment for the conveyance of letters and of travellers.

7 Paik : A footman, an inferior police or revenue officer.

Barkandaz : A gunman.

Peon : A kind of local militia doing police or military service.

8 CCRM-P, 31st Dec. 1770.

9 *Ibid.*, 25th July 1771.

collectors (karmacharis) from 18,378 persons holding 281,070 bighas of chakran lands to 13,925 persons holding 200,264 bighas.¹⁰

However, the public farming and the dismissal of the chaudhuris were not so effectual as might have been expected in lowering the local influence of the zamindar, since major portion of the estate remained in his possession under fictitious names (benamis)¹¹; the zamindar, in his capacity as a public farmer, could appoint his dependents in the parganas and thus still retained considerable influence in the countryside.

In 1772, the estate was again farmed out by the Committee of Circuit to many public contractors at a total net revenue of Sa. Rs. 1,538,671¹² for a term of five years. The zamindar once again held considerable portion of his estate in fictitious names and did his best to impede the rent collection of such contractors as were outsiders. Because of the desolated state of the country due to the great famine of 1770, the high government demand, the zamindar's intrigue, and their short sighted exactions, almost all the contractors fell into the arrears of revenue, and were ruined. The Company's government was then obliged to return the management of the estate to the zamindar before the completion of the stipulated term of five years.¹³

From 1775 to 1780 was a period of relative ease for him, since the settlement of the estate was concluded with him at a fixed and easy sum (Sa. Rs. 1,275,968) for his life time. This short period saw the last phase of the diminishing glory of the 'old' zamindar. Thanks to the easy assessment, no arrears of revenue occurred and he could afford to restore considerable part of the establishments which had been reduced by the government.¹⁴

After his death in 1780, the Committee of Revenue farmed out the Dinajpur estate to Rajah Devy Sing, a public revenue contractor, for two years at a considerably increased sum (Sa. Rs. 1,475,968). During the tenure of his farm, he sent his men into many parganas and collected the rent from the peasants in his own way. Because of the ruthless exaction, the estate was put into confusions and the

10 *Ibid.*, App. No. 6.

11 See chapter 3 of my Ph. D. dissertation.

12 CC-P, 26th Jany. 1773, Account Settlement.

13 For detail, see chapter 3 of my Ph. D. dissertation

14 Do.

local customs concerning the rent collection¹⁵ were greatly disturbed. In Rangpur and Edrackpur that were also held in farm by him, widespread agrarian disturbances broke out against his atrocious exactions and many lives were lost in them.¹⁶ The zamindar's local influence as well as his net-work of the estate control must have been seriously crippled in consequence of Devy Sing's public farming.

After this disastrous experience, the management of the estate was again returned to the minor zamindar, who was adopted by the late zamindar at his death-bed, under the guardianship of Jankiram Sing, a brother of the deceased zamindar's wife.¹⁷ Though the revenue was regularly paid during this period, we should not overlook some dangerous developments in the financial and managerial structures of the estate: firstly, the increasing indebtedness, secondly, the growing expenditures on the religious and charitable purposes with the result that the zamindar's financial reserve narrowed,¹⁸ and lastly, the combination of the office of the estate, especially that of the *chaudhuris*, with the private farming system which tended to disunite the management of the estate from within.¹⁹

In 1786, Jankiram Sing was removed from the guardianship on a dubious ground by an order of the Board of Revenue and the management was given to Ramkant Roy, who was remotely related to the zamindar, on recommendation of G. Hatch, the first collector of the district (1786 to 1793).²⁰ After this, Hatch put the estate under direct supervision, although the daily management was transacted by Ramkant Roy, the zamindari diwan. Hatch then carried into effect the so called "Hatch's Reforms" in view of facilitating his direct supervision over the estate and of effecting "Cornwallis System" in this district.²¹

Even when the young zamindar attained his majority and took over the management from Ramkant Roy in 1792, he was prohibited by a special order of the Governor-General in Council from appointing or dismissing his own servants and from changing the system of

15 For full discussion on this point, see chapter 1 of my Ph. D. dissertation.

16 See chapter 3 of my Ph. D. dissertation.

17 CR-P, 4th Dec. 1783, Nos. 20 & 21.

18 *Ibid.*, 14th Nov. 1781.

19 See section 3 of chapter 4 of my Ph. D. dissertation.

20 BDR-DNR, vol. 1, 6th Nov. 1786, No. 22.

21 For full discussion on "Hatch's Reforms", see section 5 of chapter 4 of my Ph. D. dissertation.

of estate-management introduced by Hatch.²² Therefore, the zamindar was obliged to continue the existing system and personnel, however corrupt they might be. Many well-founded instances of embezzlement by his servants were mentioned in his repeated petitions to the Board of Revenue,²³ but the latter, of which Hatch became a member in 1793, did not take any effectual means to remedy them. Under such conditions, the zamindar's authority and influence over his men and country became almost negligible. It would not be too much to say that from 1786 to 1799 he possessed but a nominal control over his estate.

There was another circumstance that tended to weaken the zamindar's local influence. It was the establishment of the new rural police system by Cornwallis. The first article of "Regulations for the Police of the Collectorships in Bengal, Behar and Orissa" passed in 1792 reads : "The police of the country is in future to be considered under the exclusive charge of the officers of Government, who may be specially appointed to that trust. The landholders and farmers of land, who keep up establishments of Tannadars and police officers for the preservations of peace, are accordingly required to discharge them and all landholders and farmers of land are prohibited entertaining such establishments in future".²⁴ The zamindar's police system (thanadari system) was thus taken over by the Company's government and the public police officers (Daroghas), who were equipped with a party of semi-military establishment, were stationed in the interior of the estate.²⁵ The estate of Dinajpur was divided into 25 police jurisdictions (thanas) and a Daroga with his establishment was appointed in each thana. The British district magistrate, under whose orders the daroghas were placed, was thus in a position to put the whole countryside under his inspection. Needless to say, the zamindar was no longer able to exercise unlimited authority over the peasants in his estate.

So far we have briefly traced the process of the decline of the zamindar's local influence. It is noticeable from what we have seen that this decline was largely effected through the intervention of the Company's government in the estate management.

22 BR P, 24th Sep. 1793, Nos. 46-52; *Ibid.*, 1st Oct. 1793, No. 1.

23 *Ibid.*, 3rd Jany. 1793, Nos. 39-48 BR-W-P, 3rd June 1794, Nos. 6-7.

24 W. R. Gourlay, *A Contribution towards a History of the Police in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1916, pp. 29-30.

25 JD-Cr-P, 18th Oct 1793, Nos. 13-15.

The causes of the decrease in the assets of the estate may now be briefly studied. It was brought about by various factors: The great famine of 1770 was said to have turned more than one-fifth of the cultivated lands in Dinajpur into the waste,²⁶ the exactions of the public revenue contractors put the country into great confusions twice (1771 to 1774 & 1781 to 1783), large scale desertions of the peasants occurred in 1780 & 1797 in consequence of the impositions of a large sum of temporary dues (mathots & mangans),²⁷ and the closure of the influx of the Tista river in 1787 caused a decline in the grain trade in that part of the country because of the loss of the means of transportation.²⁸ However destructive these causes were to the assets of the estate, their effects were either temporary or partial. There were some others that were more dangerous and universal. They were the manoeuvre of the peasants and the misappropriation of the assets by the zamindar's servants and government officers.

At least from the beginning of the 1780's, the British administrators began to consider the fraudulent activities of the peasants as one of the main cause of the zamindars' difficulties in their revenue payment in many parts of Bengal. This view was clearly reflected in a series of reports on the subject of the conclusion of the decennial settlement sent to the Board of Revenue by the collectors of the different districts at the end of the 1780's.²⁹ On the basis of these reports we may classify the manoeuvres of the peasants in the following way: (1) To take in more land than a lease (pattah) entitles him to do, (2) To hold land at an inferior rate of rent which he obtained through fraudulent practices, and (3) To enter into collusion with the zamindar's servants and obtain a deduction in the original rent (asal jama) by forging the village accounts etc. In some localities in the districts of Rangpur and Murshidabad, decrease of the assets on account of such artifices amounted to nearly half of their actual value.³⁰

Hatch wrote in 1788 that "the original Jumma or Rent-roll has decreased from several causes, the chief of which is the manoeuvre that has been in practice for many years by the Mundulls [village-

26 CCRM-P, 4th Feb. 1771

27 BDR-DNR, vol. 2, 16th Jany. 1782, No 254; JD-Cv-P, 5th Jahy 1798, No 19.

28 BR-P, 9th Nov 1787, No. 17.

29 GGC-RD-P, 10th Feb. 1790.

30 BR-P, 22nd March 1790, No. 14; *ibid.*, 12th May 1795, No 51.

heads], Paramanicks [village-heads] and the principal inhabitants of the villages who under the plea of real or fictitious desertions of the Riarts have got into their possession considerable tracts of ground at an under-rated assessment upon Moota Pottah [fixed lease] and the original established rate or Nirkh has become obsolete”³¹ Ramkant Roy, the diwan of the Dinajpur estate, also complained of the collusive activities by the peasants: “The Assul Jumma uniformly of the mahals [small fiscal divisions] of Pargana Havillee Punjerah & ca. [Dinajpur estate] has been considerably reduced owing to fixed grants commonly called Moodtar—under-valued lands or Riatee Joat, Nirkh Cummee [lowered rates of rent], and Dellassa Cummee³²—to Mundulls, Poramanics and others.” They obtained such under-valued lands from “the Mustophees and the Mofussil Omla [local officers]” through collusive means. He continued, “in lieu of the reduced rate of the Assil Jumma, the Maungyan, and deficiency from desertions, Abwabs have annually been increased...this is the cause of the decrease of the Assil Jumma and the increase of the Abwabs and Mathots.”³³ Thus gradually but steadily the peasants of Dinajpur eroded the assets of the estate and narrowed its financial basis. Continual decrease in the assets of the estate obliged the zamindar to levy numerous new taxes to make up for the deficiency, and the confusions in the usages of the country concerning the rent collection further deepened.³⁴ A petition submitted to the British authority by the new zamindars of Dinajpur in 1799 shows the serious damages that the manoeuvres of the peasants gave to the ‘old’ zamindar: “The ryots being acquainted with those rules [distrain regulations], pay a small portion of their rent for two or three months after the Poonea [a ceremony held before commencing the cultivation for a new year], and then absconded at the season of their crops, they sell them to other persons...At present, the zamindars can get nothing from such a ryot...The zamindars are, therefore, unable to realize the large balances due to them from the ryots...Owing to this, that extensive Estate of the Rajah of Dinajpur as well as those of many other zamindars have been ruined.”³⁵ There would be scarcely any doubt that such activities of the peasants were made possible only

31 BDR-DNR, vol 2, 15th Jan'y 1788, No. 277.

32 The meaning of this term could not be ascertained.

33 BRP, 11th April 1788, No. 58 (Enclosure C).

34 For the details, see section 1 of chapter 1 & section 1 of chapter 6 of my Ph. D. dissertation.

35 BR-P, 2nd July 1799, No 80.

when the zamindar's control over his country became loose and weak.

The assets of the estate also decreased due to the malpractices of the zamindar's servants and the district officers of the government. As we have seen, embezzlement of the assets reached an alarming height under "Hatch's Reforms". There is much truth in the following accusation by the zamindar of Dinajpur of the misdeeds of his servants and the government officers :³⁶

These officers...from the wicked and treacherous views, were so negligent and inattentive in collecting the rents of the Momussil and in paying the Revenue to the Collector that in the space of 3 years, they suffered the balances to the amount of 8 lacks of rupees to accrue in the Mofussil, and out of the amount of the collections, they themselves appropriated nearly 5 lacks leaving me 4 lacks of arrears to Government. In consequence of this my zamindary was sold at public sale...Phoolchund, Dewan to the Collector and the grandson of the Dewan of my zamindary, by name, Manickchund...and Wullee Mohammed, Nazir to the Collector & ca. officers of the Collectorship and the officers of the Adawlut [court] of Zillah [district] Dinajpur, as also those of my zamindary, Manickchund & ca. having fraudulently concerted and leagued with each other, contrived by means of their collusion to depreciate the value of several fertile and productive mahals... [they] have purchased the whole of my zamindary..."

Available historical records show that the zamindar of Dinajpur were almost always burdened with certain amount of debts. We, however, notice in the nature of his indebtedness a great change that took place in the middle of the 1780's. It would be helpful for the understanding of this change to have a glance at the relationship between the zamindar and the mahajans (bankers) previous to the middle of the 1780's. This relationship seems to have originated in the need of the zamindar to transmit the revenue to the government treasury at Murshidabad. Instead of sending it in specie, the zamindar used to pay it in bills of exchange of the established bankers of Murshidabad, such as Jagat Seth and Ganesh Das, who had their branches (kutis) in the town of Dinajpur.³⁷ The Seths seem to have

36 *Ibid.*, 11th Nov. 1800, No. 14

37 PCR-DNR-P, 13th June 1775.

opened their branch and granary (golah) there at the end of the 17th century.³⁸ These bankers transacted the grain trade as well as the banking business in this region, where fine winter rice (aman dhan) was abundantly produced. They were therefore willing to grant the zamindar the bills payable at Murshidabad and receive the currencies from him, with which they made their purchase of grain in the countryside.³⁹ The zamindar was thus relieved from the excessive expenses and danger attending the remittance of specie by land,⁴⁰ while the bankers could obtain the necessary currencies for their grain purchase on the spot in addition to the usual commission receivable from the zamindar on granting him their bills. As long as the bankers did not question his financial stability, they seldom hesitated to give him loans to make up for the occasional deficiencies. And the zamindar creditably repaid them when the peasants paid the main portion of their rent.⁴¹ Such was the relationship between the zamindar and the bankers. Therefore his indebtedness before the middle of the 1780's did not necessarily mean the deterioration in his financial condition.

However, the insolvent debts began to accumulate on account of the decline of his local influence, decrease in his assets, increase in the government demand, and the introduction of "Hatch's Reforms". In 1786, the Board of Revenue, in expectation of a higher revenue, ordered the British administrators in the districts to resume the allowances of the zamindars that used to be deducted from the gross collection of the country.⁴² In the Dinajpur district, Hatch accordingly resumed the zamindar's annual allowance (moshaira) and the charges of the estate management (akrajaut) amounting in all to a large sum of Sa. Rs. 184,444, and the net revenue payable to the government increased from Sa. Rs. 1,275,968 in 1784 to Sa. Rs. 1,460,444 in 1787.⁴³ This meant an enhancement of revenue by 14.5%. As regards "Hatch's Reforms", it is suffice for the purpose of our present discussion to point out that it meant for the zamindar of Dinajpur the virtual dispossession of the management of the estate out of his

38 BDR-DNR, vol. 1, 16th Dec. 1789. No. 496.

39 *Ibid.*

40 It was not rare that the public mney escorted by a party of armed men was plundered on its way to Murshidabad by a gang of thieves (dacoits). BR-P, 18th April 1791, Nos. 8-10.

41 CCRM-P, 21st Jany. 1771, LR No. 25 & LS. No. 44.

42 BDR-DNR, vol. 1, 4th May 1786, No. 2

43 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 15th Jany 1788, No. 277; BR-P, 13th April 1789, No. 50.

hands, creation of a system of fat salary⁴⁴ which nearly emptied his financial resources, and the almost unrestricted embezzlement by his servants and government officers. With the increase of the government demand and the introduction of "Hatch's Reforms" in the middle of the 1780's, his finance became completely helpless, and it was no more possible for him to repay the debts as regularly as he once used to do with the result that the insolvent debts rapidly accumulated in his name. And the zamindar was obliged to mortgage part of his estate to the bankers and other creditors as security for the loans,⁴⁵ without which his estate must have been ruined much earlier. And it further narrowed his financial basis. One document of 1788 shows that his debts to the House of Ganesh Das alone amounted to a huge sum of Rs. 329,049.⁴⁶ According to our estimate, the zamindar of Dinajpur acquired Rs. 60,000 to 100,000 as his net surplus collection, after making all the necessary disbursements such as government revenue, expenses of the establishments for the control of the estate, and the private housekeeping expenses including the religious and charitable expenditures.⁴² Therefore, his debts from Ganesh Das alone amounted to more than three times as large as his capacity for annual repayment.

II. *New Purchasers*

The combined effects of the various factors, which we have enumerated above, drove the zamindar's finance into near bankruptcy. The break-up of his estate became inevitable when a suit was instituted against him by Banarassi Ghose, a big banker at Calcutta in 1797,⁴⁸ though actual sale commenced in April 1798. One great disadvantage for the zamindar was that in the years 1798 & 1799 the loan markets of Bengal was extremely tight and it was nearly impossible for him to get any loans in these years even at an exorbitant rate of interest.⁴⁹ The storm of public auctions which raged in many parts of Bengal

44 J Elot, the collector, remarks : "there being many surplus and unnecessary servants of late taken into the Rajah's employ, whose allowance and wages would absorb near the whole of the Rajah's surplus assets." BR-W-P, 30th May 1794, No 7 ; And also Rajah's petition forwarded to the Board of Revenue, BR-W-P, 25th April 1794, No. 6.

45 BR-P, 30th Jany. 1787, Nos 37-40.

46 *Ibid*, 5th August 1788

47 See section 1 of chapter 2 of my Ph D. dissertation.

48 BR-P, 28th March 1800, Nos. 11-12.

49 *Ibid.*, 10th August 1798. No. 36.

from 1796 to 1802⁵⁰ and "the numerous loans that the government floated from time to time, primarily as a means of financing war operation"⁵¹ would largely explain this tight loan market at this time. Once a zamindar in a difficult condition was abandoned by the bankers, he was sure to fail in the payment of revenue and under the severe sale law the arrear of revenue of an instalment (kist) meant an immediate sale of his estate in part or in whole. And once even a portion of his estate was sold, no banker would lend him money on any condition. The estate of such zamindar would break into pieces before long. This was what happened in the estate of the 'old' zamindar of Dinajpur at the end of the 18th century.

At the end of 1203 B.S. (April 1797), considerable balance (Rs. 133,424) remained due to the government, but it was somehow cleared.⁵² The first instalment of 1204 B.S. again could not be realized, and C. Bird, the then collector, put up a pargana, revenue of which was Rs. 60,915, for sale at the public auction without a prior confirmation of the Board of Revenue. It was purchased by Lala Manikchand, the then zamindari diwan, at Rs. 31,000. As this was obviously an illegal sale, the Board intervened, and cancelled it.⁵³ Towards the end of 1204 B.S. the arrear of revenue started to accumulate, and by the end of Mavg 1204 B.S. (February 1798) the balance of revenue amounted to a huge sum of Rs. 451,691.⁵⁴ In spite of the zamindar's petition that owing to the drought the ryots could not pay their rent, the Governor-General in Council did not relent and authorized the sale of part of the estate.⁵⁵ In April 1798, the first public sale took place and 41 lots, the revenue of which was Rs. 283,586, were sold at Rs. 281,660.⁵⁶

By September 1799, there remained in the hands of the zamindar no property that could be sold. His residence, movable property and even the Hindu temples (thakurbaris) were attached for the uncleared

50 Sirajul Islam, "Changes in Land Control in Bengal under the early operation of the Permanent Settlement", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, vol. 17, No. 3, 1972, p. 24, Table-1.

51 B. B. Chaudhuri, "Land Market in Eastern India, 1793-1940 Part I: The Movement of Land Prices", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. xii-1, 1975, p. 11.

52 BR-P, 7th July 1797, No. 24.

53 *Ibid.*, 1st August 1797, No. 36; *ibid.*, 15th August 1797, No. 58A.

54 *Ibid.*, 23rd March 1798, Nos. 43 & 47.

55 *Ibid.*, 13th March 1798, No. 23; *ibid.*, 24th April 1798, No. 25.

56 *Ibid.*, 11th May 1798, No. 35; BR-M-AC-DNR.

revenue.⁵⁷ Until his death in 1801 the zamindar was encumbered with public and private debts. G. Smith, the collector, reported his death to the Board of Revenue with the following words :⁵⁸

What his circumstances were but a very short time back is well known, especially, to two of you, Mr. Harington & Mr. Hatch. He died in such a state of poverty as to be kept a prisoner in house by his creditors who were bent upon seizing him and throwing him into the common Jail, while such was this wretched man's end, two Dewans & I fear I may add the grandson of one of them (I allude to Phoolchund, the late Dewan of this Collectorship) are rich and fat & flourishing and are proprietors of some of the finest parts of what was their poor Lord's very fine Estate."

(1) Analysis of the New Purchasers

Here we shall analyse the social origins of the purchasers of lots, who bought them at the public auctions held between April 1798 and December 1799.

The available accounts of sales cover more than eighty per cent of the total revenue demand of this estate.⁵⁹ Therefore the analysis of these data would give us a fairly correct idea about the people who acquired the lots at the public auctions. Our data contain the accounts of thirteen such sales, where 239 lots the revenue of which amounted to Rs. 1,195,919 were auctioned to more than 160 persons at the total purchase money of Rs. 837, 359. All the original sales were held at the office of the collector at Dinajpur. Once several lots were sold in Calcutta after an unsuccessful sale at Dinajpur, but the prices offered there were so low as about one-third of their revenue that the public sale in Calcutta was abandoned once for all.⁶⁰

As our accounts give only the names and places of residence of the purchasers, the identification of them cannot be very correct and remains tentative. For example, one Parbutty Churn bought two lots at Rs. 16,525. In the proceedings of the Board of Revenue, we find two Parbutty Churn, one a merchant, and the other a servant of the

57 BR-P, 6th Sep 1799, Nos. 26 & 36.

58 *Ibid.*, 3rd Feb. 1801, No. 7.

59 BR-M-AC-DNR.

60 *Ibid.*, (A Sale Account dated the 2nd July 1798).

zamindar of Dinajpur. We have no sure means to ascertain which of the two was the purchaser at the auction. In this case, we, however, identified him with Parbutty Churn Nandi, a merchant, simply because a zamindari servant could hardly afford to buy so big lots. The analysis given below should be taken with this reservation.

The following Table—1 shows the names, the places of residence, the number of lots, the revenue and the purchase money of such purchasers whose respective aggregate revenues exceeded Rs. 20,000.

Table—1 : The big Purchasers whose respective aggregate Revenues exceeded Rs. 20,000

Names	Residence	Number of Lots	Aggregate Revenue	Amount of Purchase
			Sa. Rs.	Sa. Rs.
1. Narainchand Roy	Dinajpur	27	100,252	41,875
2. Motter Mohun Sein	Calcutta	8	56,614	18,120
3. Bidenaut Dutt Mandal	Raujeganj	8	53,594	53,200
4. Kishenkat Rny	Dinajpur	8.53	39,190	30,136
5. Uli Mahomed	Dinajpur	7	38,602	35,400
6. Bowani Talukdar	Raujeganj	7.5	33,878	21,160
7. Dhirnarain Chowdry	Kholorah	5	32,788	24,260
8. Roy Nitinand	Murshidabad	6	30,392	29,125
9. Manickchand	Patna	4	28,812	26,375
10. Rani Tripuri Sundari	Dinajpur	5	24,933	29,050
11. Thakurdas Nandi	Khulna	3	21,805	6,100
12. Rani Sursutty Anondmoy	Dinajpur	3	21,579	15,260
13. Utamchand	Dinajpur	5	20,121	17,225

(Source) The same as the following Table-2.

Narainchand Roy, the biggest purchaser, was a small child. He was doubtlessly a fictitious name (benami) of Ramkant Roy who held a joint-diwaniship of the estate with Lala Manickchand at the time of its breakup.⁶¹ He was promoted to that high post by Hatch, and was his faithful agent throughout his collectorship.

61 BR-P, 10th Dec. 1805 Nos. 1-3.

The second purchaser, Motter Mohun Sein obtained these 8 lots at very low prices at a public sale held in Calcutta. His profession could not be ascertained. He afterwards sold a portion of them to six persons.⁶²

Bidenaut Dutt Mandal, the third purchaser, was a big merchant at Rajeganj, a commercial center of the Dinajpur district. His son Juddonaut Dutt also bought 5 lots (aggregate revenue Rs. 15,404; purchase money Rs. 14,565). Bidenaut Mandal lent money to the zamindar and took one pargana as mortgage in 1798.⁶³

Kishenkant Roy, the fourth purchaser, was a brother of Ramkant Roy. He bought several lots in the districts of Rangpur and Dinajpur, the total revenue of which amounted to Rs. 50,000.⁶⁴

Uli Mahommed, the fifth purchaser, was a senior officer (nazir) of the collectorate. He first purchased them in his own name. But, J. Eliot, the collector, advised him to use fictitious name because the government officers were prohibited by regulation from acquiring the lots at public auctions,⁶⁵ and put off the sale. He bought these lots in his sons' names at the next sale. He also lent money to the zamindar through Lala Manickchand, the diwan, at an exorbitant rate of interest in 1796 & 1797.⁶⁶

Bowani Pershaud Sirma Talukdar, the sixth purchaser, was a chief record-keeper (sheristadar mukhy) of the Dinajpur collectorate. He bought these lots in his son's name. Immediately after the purchase, he privately sold some of them to two persons, and presumably made a handsome profit out of the difference in the sale prices.⁶⁷

Dhirmarain Chowdry, the seventh purchaser, was recorded as an old zamindar of Kholorah in Purnea.⁶⁸

62 *Ibid.*, 31st July 1801, No. 10.

63 *Ibid.*, 19th June 1801, No. 30.

64 *Ibid.*, 8th August 1801, No. 31.

65 By Section 15th Regulation 2nd 1793, "all native officers, private servants and dependents of Collectors and their Assistants are prohibited from purchasing directly or indirectly any lands that the Collector may dispose of at a public sale, under the penalty of forfeiting the property to Government..." BR-P, 20th June 1800, No. 12

66 BR-P, 10th Dec. 1805, Nos. 1-3.

67 *Ibid.*, 4th Nov. 1800, No. 24.

68 *Ibid.*, 27th Nov. 1798, No. 24.

Roy Nitinand, the eighth purchaser, resided at Murshidabad, but his profession could not be ascertained.

Lala Manickchand, the ninth purchaser, was a powerful man in the districts of Dinajpur and Rangpur. He had for many years officiated as the public diwan of the district and the joint-diwan of the Dinajpur estate. His nephews Kirtichand and Sungum Loll, also bought some lots. The sale-accounts show that the former obtained one lot (revenue Rs. 6,082; purchase money Rs. 400) and the latter one (revenue Rs. 8,427; purchase money Rs. 5,275). Phulchand, who was a grandson of Maniskchand and held the office of the public diwan of the Dinajpur district at the time of the break-up of the estate, deposed before E. Webb, the then collector, that Kirtichand bought 4 lots and Mitter Loll, Maniskchand's nephew 2 lots.⁶⁹ The zamindar of Dinajpur alleged in one of his petitions that Phulchand also purchased many lots of which revenue amounted to one lack of rupees,⁷⁰ but the truth of it could not be ascertained. Thus, we may safely conclude that Manickchand and his relations purchased much more lots than what the available sale-accounts indicate.

Rani Tripuri Sundari, the tenth purchaser, was a wife of the zamindar of Dinajpur.

Thakurdas Nandi, the eleventh purchaser, was one of the leading merchants at Rajeganj.⁷¹ According to Buchanan, who made an exhaustive survey of this district in the years 1807 & 1808, he resided at Khulna near Calcutta and used to purchase in Dinajpur a large quantity of rice, which he dispatched to Calcutta and Murshidabad markets.⁷² We find some other Nandis in the sale-accounts. Jaideb Nandi bought two lots (aggregate revenue Rs. 14,453; purchase money Rs. 6,000) and Kashinath one lot (revenue Rs. 6,531; purchase money Rs. 3,100). They were most probably the relations of Thakurdas, because both of them purchased the lots at the same auction held in Calcutta as he did. Parbutty Churn Nandi, a big banker of Dinajpur, who had commercial transactions with some of the senior officers of the collectorate,⁷³ might well be identified with a Parbutty

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 4th Nov. 1800, No. 24.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 11th Nov. 1800, No. 14.

⁷¹ JD-Cv-P, 29th May 1795, Nos. 13-15.

⁷² F. Buchanan, *A geographical, statistical and historical Description of the District or Zila of Dinajpur in the Province of Soubah of Bengal*, 1833, p. 317.

⁷³ BR-P, 3rd. Jany. 1806, No. 8.

Churn, the eighteenth purchaser, who acquired two lots (aggregate revenue Rs. 14,381; purchase money Rs. 16,525) at the public sale. There was one more Nandi, Rajkishore, who was a considerable banker at Murshidabad and had his branches at Dinajpur and Calcutta.⁷⁴ It is possible that these Nandis belonged to the same family.

Utamchand, the thirteenth purchaser, was a son of Khurruc Sing Nahar, a big Marwari merchant of Rajeganj. Khurruc Sing himself acquired 2 lots (aggregate revenue Rs. 11,377; purchase money Rs. 17,350) in his own name. Khurruc Sing was one of the creditors of the zamindar of Dinajpur, and took one pargana as security.⁷⁵

The following Table—2 shows the five main groups among the new purchasers of the Dinajpur estates at the public auctions.

TABLE 2

A Table showing the Number, respective aggregate Revenues and Purchase Money of the Lots bought up by the Five Main Groups at the Public Sales.

Groups & Names	Number of Lots	Aggregate Revenue Sa. Rs.	Purchase Money Sa. Rs
1. <i>Zamindar's Servants</i>			
Ramkant Roy, late zamindari diwan, (including lots bought by his relation & in benami)	37.53	150,482	74,736
Munnalal &c., old family servants	2.67	16,476	9,078
Chytun Churn Neiogi, tahsildar ⁷⁶ (in benami)	2.33	11,101	4,308
Sutchinandan, tahsildar	1	7,160	7,700
Binnoderam, late naib of pargana	1	6,935	6,700
Rajeb Ali, Do	1	6,464	2,905
Santiram, Do.	1	4,525	2,658
Ganganarain Chowdry, Do.	1	4,301	630
Ramchunder Roy, tahsildar	1	3,528	800
Deen Dyal, Do.	0.5	2,572	745
	49.03	213,544	110,260

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 23rd Dec. 1800. No. 25.

⁷⁵ JD-Cv-P. 29th May 1705, No. 14; F. O. Bell, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Dinajpur, 1934-1940, 1942*, u. 74.

⁷⁶ A pargana officer appointed by G. Hatch and Ramkant Roy.

TABLE 2—(Contd.)

Groups & Names	Number of Lots	Aggregate Revenue Sa. Rs.	Purchase Money Sa. Rs.
<i>2. Government Officers</i>			
Manickchand, late public diwan (including his relations)	7.5	43,321	32,050
Uli Mahommed, nazir, (in benami)	7	38,602	35,400
Bowani Talukdar, sheristadar mukhy (in benami)	7.5	33,878	21,160
Fernandez, writer, (in benami)	3	14,251	14,450
Bidenaut Chowdry, sheristadar of Abkari (in benami)	3	12,630	9,275
Shibchand, collector of police-tax	2.5	11,075	12,725
Mohammed Ali, munshi, ⁷⁷ (in benami)	2	9,813	1,000
Syed Mahommed, kazi of Murshidabad Court of Circuit & Appeal	1	7,882	5,100
Jaggernaut Sein, collector's private servant	1	6,876	4,000
Musshitullah, munshi	1.5	4,653	3,288
Luckykant, collector of police-tax	1.5	4,548	1,573
Radhakant Das, mohrir of Abkari establishment ⁷⁸	0.83	4,303	797
Ganganarain Sein, record-keeper	0.5	2,572	745
Myaram Shah, collector of police-tax	0.5	2,412	1,652
Rajmohun, mohrir of collectorate	0.33	2,148	308
	39.67	198,964	143,523
<i>3. Merchants</i>			
Bidenaut Mandal (including his relation)	14	74,462	70,670
Nandis. (Thakurdas, Jaideb & Kashinaut)	6	42,789	15,200
Khurruc Sing (including his relation)	7	31,498	34,575
Parbuttychurn Nandi	2	14,381	16,525
Rajeb Lochun	1	6,464	2,905
	30	170,594 ⁷⁹	139,875

77 An interpreter of Persian and Hindustani in the collectorate.

78 A writer of the government establishment for the collection of dues from the manufacturers and vendors of the intoxicating liquors.

79 In the sale-accounts, there are three persons whose titles strongly suggest that they belonged to mercantile social groups. They are Girdhar Shah, (continued in the next page)

TABLE 2—(Concl'd.)

Groups&Names	Number of Lots	Aggregate Revenue Sa. Rs.	Purchase Money Sa. Rs.
4. <i>Zamundar's Close Relations</i>			
Rani Tripuri	5	24,933	29,050
Rani Sursutty	3	21,579	15,260
Janknaut Sing	1	11,106	7,650
Gourmohun Sing	0.33	1,894	456
	9.33	59,512	52,416
5. <i>Neighbouring Zamindars</i>			
Dhirnarain Chowdry, zamindar of Kholorah, (including his relations)	7	42,095	26,760
Rajmoy Chowdrain & Kishenchand zamindars of Purnea district	2	7,452	1,930
	9	49,547	28,690
Grand Total	137.03	692,161	474,764

(Sources) Prepared from the relevant statements in BR-M-AC-DNR and the proceedings of BR-P. JD-Cv-P &c. For the identification of the new purchasers, the following were most useful.

BR-P : 20-6-1800, Nos. 9—30	; 29-7-1800, Nos. 2—3.
14-10-1800, No. 6	; 4-11-1800, Nos. 23—27.
11-11-1800, No. 13	; 12-6-1801, Nos. 45—46.
19-6-1801, Nos. 27A—31	; 7-7-1801, No. 54.
17-7-1801, Nos. 9—16	; 24-7-1801, No. 9.
8-8-1801, Nos. 31 & 39	; 1-5-1804, Nos. 37—39.
7-8-1804, Nos. 16—17	; 10-12-1805, Nos. 1—3.
3-1-1806, Nos. 6—8	; 26-12-1806, No. 19.

Besides these primary sources, F. O. Bell, *op. cit.*, was also useful.

Our data relate to 13 public sales in which 239 lots (aggregate revenue Rs. 1, 195,919; purchase money Rs. 837,359) were auctioned. Out of them, the purchasers whose revenue amounted in all to

(continued from the last page)

Tautty Dalal, and Ramdalal and their total lots number 5.5, their aggregate revenue Rs. 27,531 and their purchase money Rs. 23,445. We however excluded them from this table, because we do not have any documentary evidence to support this supposition.

Rs. 771,089 could be identified, and more than ninety per cent of these identified ones belonged to the above-mentioned five social groups. Thus, they nearly monopolized the lots that were sold at the public sales. However, it should be noted that the classification in Table-2 remain tentative. For example, Lala Manikchand is classified in Table-2 into the *Government Officers*, but in fact he also held a post of the zamindari diwan at the same time. He was once a high officer of the Mughal government, and then was employed by some British local administrators in Rangpur.⁸⁰ It seems that he acquired the great influence and property in this locality through his relation with the Company's government. We, therefore, judged it proper to classify him as a government officer. Ramkant Roy, the zamindari diwan, was remotely related to the zamindar's family,⁸¹ but we grouped him with the *Zamindari Servants*, not with the *Zamindar's Close Relations*, because he acquired his influence and wealth by exploiting his office of the zamindari diwan to which he was promoted by G. Hatch. He was in fact considered an enemy by the zamindar.⁸²

Table-2 still then clearly shows that the government officers, the zamindar's servants and the merchants-cum-bankers, who had been the chief agents in bringing about the fall of the estate of Dinajpur, figured prominently among the new purchasers. As we have mentioned before, many of the bigger purchasers used to lend money to the zamindar and take the parganas on mortgage. It is probable, though it is difficult to prove, that many of them obtained the lost in lieu of their insolvent loans to the zamindar.

F. O. Bell, the settlement officer of the Dinajpur district, wrote: "Stories circulate that servants of the Rajah did well by buying up lots but there is little trace of purchase by such men; unless we count Ramkant and his brother." He further argued that "Government servants figured among the purchasers to a small extent."⁸³ But contrary to Bell's contention, Table-2 establishes that the government officers and the zamindar's servants were the main purchasers.

The reasons for the concentration of the lots in the hands of the above five groups would be, at least, two-fold. Firstly, the public

80 BDR-DNR, vol. 2, 16th April 1787, No. 134; BR-W-P, 25th July 1794, No. 1.

81 BDR-DNR, vol. 2, 16th June 1787, No. 149.

82 BR-P, 3rd Jan'y 1794, No. 42 (A petition submitted by the zamindar of Dinajpur).

83 F.O. Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

auction was conducted by the interested government officers and, therefore, it was difficult for those who were unacquainted with them to purchase any profitable lots at the public sales.⁸¹ Secondly, the size of the lots sold was too large for the local people to purchase. It was the strict order of the Board of Revenue that the revenue of each lot put up for sale should be kept up, as far as it was practicable, at about Rs. 5,000,⁸⁵ as they did not like the estate to be divided into smaller lots. In 1804, T. Graham, the collector, argued that if the Board would approve of sale of the lots in smaller size, it would "from admitting the Mundulls of the pargana to come forward, occasion a greater competition amongst the Bidders at the time of Sale, and consequently increase the probable amount purchase."⁸⁶ Had the Board allowed to sell the estate in smaller size, the composition of the new zamindars might have been somewhat different.

In this connection, the frequent sales and partitions immediately after the auction would be worthy of our notice. Sometimes, those who were well acquainted with the collector and his officers purchased the lots in their names at the auction, but the purchase money was, in fact, paid by others who wished to secure them for themselves. The latter got possession of such lots after the sale was over through a nominal private sale, and the former, of course, received a handsome sum as reward.⁸⁷ In other case, several persons, who wanted to buy portion of a lot, united together and purchased it in joint-ownership. Sometimes they continued to hold the lot jointly, and sometimes they divided it among themselves by a public or private partition (batwara).⁸⁸

When we look at the sale-accounts, we cannot but be struck with the low prices at which the Dinajpur estate was sold in 1799. The tight loan market in 1798 & 1799 must have been one of the reasons. However, more destructive to the zamindar was the malpractices of the government officers. The unfair and inequitable assessment of the estate at the quinquennial registration prepared by Hatch in 1198

84 BP-P, 4th Nov. 1800, No. 24; *ibid.*, 10th Dec. 1805, Nos. 1—3; Rajah Rammohun Roy, "On the System of India", *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, Part III, 1947, p. 44, Answers 26 & 27.

85 BR-P, 11th Oct. 1799, No. 18; *ibid.*, 17th April 1801, No. 3.

86 *Ibid.*, 6th Nov. 1804, No. 16

87 *Ibid.*, 4th Nov. 1800, Nos. 23—27; *ibid.*, 24th Feb. 1801, No. 2; *ibid.*, 12th June 1801, No. 46.

88 *Ibid.*, 30th Jany. 1801, No. 26; *ibid.*, 14th August 1804, No. 20.

B.S. (A.D. 1791/2) deserves our special notice. In this registration, some of the mahals were underassessed, while some others overvalued.⁸⁹ Consequently, some of them became very profitable, and some other loosing concerns. Of course, the government officers knew very well which mahals were profitable and which not. The Board of Revenue observed in their letter to Wellesley, the Governor-General in Council, in 1804 that "we have every reason to suppose that the low price at which the lands in Dinajpur sold at that period [1799] was occasioned in a great measure by the improper influence of the Amlah attached to the Collector's office,"⁹⁰ and recommended the resale of the lands which were bought by Radhakant, the late mohrir of Abkari establishment in fictitious name. The resale of the lands, which Radhakant had obtained at Rs. 205 in 1799, yielded a huge sum of Rs. 12,335 in 1804.⁹¹ This instance suggests the extent of the misdeeds done by the government officers at the time of the public sale in that year. This uneven assessment would to some extent explain why many of the new purchasers failed to pay up their revenue and their estates had to be resold by the government before long : Between 1800 and 1805, at least, 83 lots or portions of lots with a total revenue of Rs. 189,131 were resold in Dinajpur, the purchase money of which was Rs. 279,396.⁹²

(2) Estate Management by the New Purchasers

In 1194 B.S. (A.D. 1787/8) the Dinajpur district consisted of 28 estates, but immediately after the break-up of the old zamindar's estate, which had formed about ninety per cent of the district, it was owned by no less than 400 smaller zamindars.⁹³ Thus, the old and big zamindar fell and numerous new and small ones came into existence.

As noted earlier, the new purchasers were mostly the government officers, former zamindar's servants and merchants. Many of them had their professions to look after, and the management of their new acquisitions was trusted to their agents (diwans or gomasthas). The absentee landlordism thus rapidly prevailed and it is likely to have opened a wide scope for illegal exactions by the agents in the country-

89 *Ibid.*, 7th Nov. 1800, No. 24 ; F. Buchanan, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

90 BR-P, 1st May 1804, No. 39.

91 *Ibid.*, 7th August 1804, Nos. 15—17.

92 BR-M-AC-DNR.

93 W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. 7, rep. 1974, pp. 415 & 422.

side. Buchanan, however, observed that their estates were, generally speaking, better managed than those of the old families. He thus explained : "The agents manage everything in their own way ; but are under the necessity of being very cautious, as their masters are, in general, men of business, and those who were formerly agents themselves understand country affairs so that their estates are improving and are comparatively well managed."⁹⁴

Another circumstance which made the estate management of the new zamindars much easier was the enactment of Regulation 7 of 1799 (Haftam). By this regulation the zamindars acquired almost an unrestricted power over the peasants. The collusions of the peasants with the inferior servants of the estate still persisted,⁹⁵ but the zamindars were undoubtedly well-equipped against such collusions and other kinds of manoeuvres of the peasants under the strong support of the government, especially, that of the new judicial system set up by Cornwallis.

Uli Mahommed, the fifth purchaser, bought three lots in the pargana Dehutta.⁹⁶ Immediately after the acquisition of them, he himself went into the interior of the pargana and proclaimed that he was the new owner of the country. At the market places, he assembled the peasants and fixed bamboos, which were the symbol of the proprietor of the lands. He then "satisfied the ryots" presumably by confirming their old leases (pattahs) or by promising the grant of agricultural loans (takavi), appointed the local managers (tahsildars) to the lots, and allowed the former messengers (kotwals) and footmen (paiks), who agreed to serve under him, to continue the possession of their free service lands (chakram lands). He also appointed a mandal (village-head) at every Rs. 1,000 of rent collection. The rent was firstly collected by the mandals of the villages, and then made over to the inferior rent collectors (karmacharis). The latter delivered the same to the tahsildar of the lot, who sent it to the new zamindar, Uli Mahommed, at Rajeganj. When the peasants were dissatisfied with the tahsildars, they directly complained of it to Uli Mahommed. Though he was absent from the estate, he thus kept watch over its management.

94 F. Buchanan, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 240.

96 BR-P, 10th Dec. 1805, Nos. 1—3 ; *ibid.*, 3rd Jany. 1806, Nos. 6—9.

Buchanan referred to one Guruprosad who "not only investigates his accounts with care, but when he suspects fraud, takes the measuring rope in his own hands, and examines on the spot the veracity of his agents. Everything about him is decent and respectable and the estate is like a garden."⁹⁷

Such personal exertion was rather rare among the 'old' zamirdars, and even if they had will to do so, the extensiveness of their estates must have precluded such supervision.

Buchanan gives us some examples of the establishments kept up by the new zamindars in the early nineteenth century.

The Rajah of Dinajpur maintained the following establishments for the management of his estate "in its fallen condition", which consisted of 8 lots and one pargana.⁹⁸

TABLE 3

Establishments maintained by the Zamindar of Dinajpur for the Management of the 8 lots.

	bighas	rupees
1 Diwan who superintends the whole		1,200
8 Tahsildars or assistants		2,400
40 Mohrirs or writers		3,840
24 Sirdars or officers of the old militia	1,200	
16 Mirdhas or inferior officers of the same	480	
200 Paiks or soldiers of a more recent militia	4,000	
8 Dafadars or officers of the same		384
24 Barkandazes or soldiers of the same		864
200 Kotwals or messengers	2,000	
537	7,872	8,688

(Source) F. Buchanan, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-248.

⁹⁷ F. Buchanan, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

⁹⁸ It seems that Rani Sursutty and Ramkant Roy entered into a compromise after the death of the young zamindar in 1801. Rani adopted a son, who was most probably a close relation of Ramkant Roy. And latter, in return, made over his purchases to this new zamindar, and he himself became the diwan of this estate. Main part of these 8 lots and a pargana, of which we shall see presently, must have been originally purchased by Ramkant Roy. However, this point could not be fully verified on the basis of the available records. See also F. Buchanan, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-248.

The total rental of these 8 lots was Rs. 110,000 from which the land revenue (Rs. 79,000), expenses of the establishments paid in money (Rs. 8,688), and the commission to the renters (ijaradars) at 4% of the whole rental (Rs. 4,400), in all, Rs. 92,088 should be deducted. The net income left for the zamindar was, therefore, Rs. 17,912 or 16.3% of the gross income.⁹⁹

TABLE 4

Establishments maintained by the Zamindar of Dinajpur for the Management of a pargana.

	bighas	rupees
1 Deputy of the diwan		280
1 Jama Navis or accountant		360
7 Mohrirs		480
1 Dafadar		48
7 Barkandazes		252
3 Daftaris or keepers of papers	36	
4 Sirdars	200	
100 Paiks	2,000	
150 Kotwals	1,500	
274	3,736	1,780

(Source) The same as Table-3.

Financial structure of this pargana was as follows¹⁰⁰ : The total rental was Rs. 96,582 from which the land revenue (Rs. 81,591), expenses of the establishments paid in money (Rs. 1,780), and the commission to the renters (Rs. 3,863), in all, Rs. 87,234 should be deducted. The net income from this pargana was, therefore, Rs. 9,756 or 10.1% of the whole rental.¹⁰¹

99 F. Buchanan, *op. cit.*, pp. 247—248. He said these 8 lots were originally bought by Rani Sursutty. But our data suggest that her purchase could not be as large.

100 Buchanan wrote that this pargana "has not been sold", but this contradicts the other historical records which we have already cited before. My opinion on this, though it could not be fully documented, would be seen in the foot-note 98.

101 F. Buchanan, *op. cit.*, pp. 247—248.

Adit Chaudhuri, a merchant, purchased a small lot in the pargana of Dehutta and maintained the following establishments for its management.¹⁰²

TABLE 5

Establishments maintained by Adit Chaudhuri.

	bighas	rupees
1 Tahsildar		120
1 Jama Navis		84
1 Mohrir		36
1 Potdar or money-lender		24
2 Barkandazes		51
1 Sirdar	20	
10 Paiks	120	
7 Kotwals	56	
24	196	315

(Source) The same as Table-3.

The whole rental of this lot was Rs. 6,300 from which the land revenue (Rs. 4,500), expenses of the establishments paid in morey (Rs. 315), and the commission to the renters at 4% of the whole rental (Rs. 252), in all, Rs. 5,067 should be deducted. The zamindar, therefore, secured a sum of Rs. 1,233 or 19.6% of the gross income as his net income.

The new zamindars of Dinajpur, thus, managed their estates sometimes directly through their agents, but more often they leased out the estates, in whole or in part, to the renters (ijaradars) for terms of three to nine years. The renters received as their commission 4 to 6% of the whole rental. Even when the whole estate was farmed out to the renters, the zamindar retained his establishments for its management, and the renters were assisted in their collection of rent by them. Usually, the rent was collected by the village-head (mandal) and the village accountant (patwari) from the peasants, and it was then made over to the inferior servants (karmacharis) of the zamindar or the renters. The village accountant received 3% of

102 *Ibid.*, p. 248.

the rent collected from the village in his charge and the village-head 1%. Many inferior servants used to receive rent free lands as their reward.¹⁰³

Tables 3, 4 & 5 show that the new zamindars still retained considerable number of the semi-military establishments despite the enactment of the "Regulations for the Police..." (1792), which ordered them to dismiss all the police officers. However, we should not overlook the tendency towards the reduction of the establishments, which is apparent from the comparison of them maintained by the new zamindars with those kept up before the Permanent Settlement.¹⁰⁴

The financial condition of the new zamindars seems to have been improving thanks to the fixed assessment of the revenue, strong governmental support and gradually increasing assets of their estates. If a zamindar managed the estate directly, he could expect more than 20% of the gross income as his net profit. But in some instances, as in the case of Table-4, where the assessment of government demand was disproportionately high, he could hardly secure 10% as his net profit.

Summary and Conclusions

The prolonged process of the break-up of the Dinajpur estate might well be traceable to the political disorder during the troubled days under the Nawab Mir Kasim (1760—1763). This disorder accompanying the transfer of power from the Mughals to the British East India Company could not but has its repercussions on the power structure at the lower levels. The decline and confusions thus crept into the system of estate-control of the 'old' zamindars. Most notable features of them could be seen in the disarrangement of the customary rules concerning the rent collection and in the rapid growth of the wealthy peasants in the countryside.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the take-over

103 *Ibid.*, pp. 250—252.

104 The following rough calculation would show this : The gross estimated income and the number of the servants of all descriptions belonging to the Dinajpur estate before the Permanent Settlement were Rs. 1,750,000 and 20,049 persons respectively or one person per the gross income of Rs. 87, while those of the above three instances (Tables 3, 4 & 5) were, in total, Rs. 212,882 and 835 persons or one person per the gross income of Rs. 256. Therefore the size of the establishments of the 'new' zamindars were much less than a half of that of the 'old' zamindar.

105 For the detailed discussion on these points, see section 1 of chapter 1 & section 1 of chapter 6 of my Ph. D. dissertation

of the power by the Company in 1765 adversely affected the zamindars. The Company's government, roughly speaking, kept in mind the following two things in their decision making maximization of the land revenue from the country and the undermining of local power of the zamindars, especially the bigger ones who could be a threat to their authority. The pursuance of such policies naturally deepened the confusions in the power structure of the zamindars and resulted in the decrease in their assets. However, the decisive step towards the fall of the estate of Dinajpur was the introduction of Cornwallis System, of which the famous Permanent Settlement formed part. In Dinajpur, it was forcibly brought into effect by G. Hatch (Hatch's Reforms). In fact, it meant for the zamindar of Dinapur a sudden increase in the government demand, the virtual dispossession of the control over his own men and country, and the glaring misappropriations and misdeeds by his servants and the district officers. He was consequently driven into financial difficulties, and deeply involved in the insolvent debts. When he was abandoned by the bankers in 1797, his fall became inevitable. The sale law saw to it that this extensive estate broke into pieces in less than two years. Cornwallis System as a whole thus wrought out the fall of a big and old estate and the emergence of the new and relatively smaller ones.

Hitherto, many views were expressed as to the composition of the new landed aristocracy which sprang up out of the ruins of the old ones. Some scholar even went as far as to contend that "for more than half a century after the Permanent Settlement, there was no appreciable change in the composition and character of the rural hierarchy."¹⁰⁶ However, such a view is hard to maintain if we take into consideration that within about a decade after the Permanent Settlement, lands the revenue of which amounted to Rs. 11,767,200, accounting for about 62% of the whole revenue of Bengal,¹⁰⁷ were sold at the public auctions. Our statistical analysis clearly showed that a big and old estate of Dinajpur broke into smaller ones, whose purchasers predominantly came from the three social groups : the former zamindar's servants, government officers and the merchants. It is notable that they were the main agents in bringing about the fall of this estate. As to the second point, e.g. the change in the character of the zamindars before and after the Permanent Settlement, we shall discuss presently.

106 C. Palit, *Tensions in Bengal Rural Society*, 1975, pp. 15—16.

107 Sirajul Islam, *op. cit.*, p. 24, Table-1.

The 'old' zamindars under the Mughals, especially the bigger ones, possessed a full military character¹⁰⁸ and could be a threat to the government authority. They also had more or less judicial power within their territories. And in their relation with the peasants they openly exercised coercive means and for this purpose maintained huge semi-military establishments.¹⁰⁹ The 'new' zamindars under Cornwallis System were, on the other hand, deprived of their military character and could be no longer a threat to the government. They were also, at least in theory, prohibited from retaining any police officers and from exercising magisterial & judicial authorities in their estates. Cornwallis System and the emergence of the land-market¹¹⁰ were the new elements which the 'old' zamindars scarcely experienced before. The massive public and private sales that took place after the Permanent Settlement as well as the two new elements mentioned above would account for the following developments in the nature of the 'new' zamindars' estates as pointed out by J. Westland : "Such estates differ in their nature from the old zamindaris; they are not compact and single estates extending over some tract of country where their owner is prominent as the great zamindar, but they are an accumulation of separate and separately held tenures, acquired in different times, held under all sorts of different rights, and scattered here and there over the country. Zamindari, in fact, has become more of a profession and less of a position."¹¹¹ Cornwallis System thus successfully turned the 'old' zamindars who were more in the nature of the 'feudal' lords into the 'new' zamindars who were more in the nature of the absentee landlords and speculators in lands.

Now that the new zamindars were placed under the control of the new judicial set-up (local law courts and rural polices) and were no longer allowed openly to inflict corporal punishments on the defaulting peasants, the support of the governmental mechanism to the zamindars' rent collection was considered indispensable in order to enable them to pay up their revenue regularly. The regulation VII of 1799 (Haftam), which was enacted to facilitate their rent collection by giving them nearly unrestricted power of distraint over the defaulting peasants' property under the authority of the local courts, admir-

108 Ghulam Husain, *Seir Mutaqherin*, 1902, section 14, pp. 176 177 & 204; J. Long, *Selections from unpublished Records of Government for the years 1748 to 1767 etc.*, 1869, No. 504.

109 See section 2 of chapter 1 of my Ph. D. dissertation.

110 B. B. Chaudhuri, *op. cit.*, sections III & IV.

111 J. Westland, *A Report of the District of Jessore : Its Antiquities, its History and its Commerce*, 2nd. ed. 1874, p. 143

ably suited the purpose. It afforded the zamindars the virtual free-hand in their transactions with the peasants and the rising influence of the latter in the countryside was effectually contained for a good many years to come.¹¹²

The fall of the old zamindars and the emergence of the new ones were the important aspect of the structural change¹¹³ which was thus brought about by the Company's government through a series of regulations. With the completion of this change, the Company's government successfully created a new stable agrarian structure that was fit for their colonial interests in Bengal. The tame and harmless new zamindars, who regularly filled the Company's financial needs without giving any serious troubles, might well be considered the Company's indigeneous junior partners in ruling the people and country of Bengal.

(22nd May 1978)

ABBREVIATIONS

BDR-DNR	: Bengal District Records—Dinajpur, 2 vols.
BR-P	: Proceedings of the Board of Revenue.
BR-M-AC-DNR	: Miscellaneous Records—Board of Revenue— Account Sale or Statements of Lands sold for Arrears of Revenue in the District of Dinajpur.
BR-W-P	: Proceedings of the Board of Revenue—Wards.
CC-P	: Proceeding of the Committee of Circuit.
CCR-P	: Proceedings of the Controlling Committee of Revenue.
CCRM-P	: Proceedings of the Comptrolling Council of Revenue at Murshidabad.
CR-P	: Proceedings of the Committee of Revenue.
GGC-RD-P	: Proceedings of the Governor-General in Council —Revenue Department.
JD-Cr-P	: Proceedings of the Judicial Department—Criminal.
JD-Cr-P	: Proceedings of the Judicial Department—Civil.
PCR-DNR-P	: Proceedings of the Provincial Council of Revenue at Dinajpur.

112 See chapter 7 of my Ph. D. dissertation.

113 This change, however, did not necessarily mean the total liquidation of the holders of the 'old' zamindaris. There seems to have been a considerable number of the 'old' zamindars who could successfully remould themselves into the 'new' ones.

THE NATURE OF LANDOWNERSHIP IN TAMILNADU FROM 1820 TO 1855

ARUN BANDOPADHYAY

Judged by its initially professed principle, the ryotwari system in Madras was a settlement made by the government with the ryots or cultivators to the exclusion of all intermediaries. The principle implied that each ryot or pattaholder should also be the holder of the plot of land for which he paid the revenue to the government and received a patta in return, since no other intermediary right in land was recognized between him and the latter. Professor Nilmani Mukherjee concludes in his monograph: "Under the old ryotwari system (i.e. before its overthrow during 1808-1814) established customs and old traditions like the mirasi rights about which the Collectors knew little and understood less, were completely disregarded, with the result that private property in land nearly ceased to exist."¹ There is, however, reason to believe that the principle of ignoring all intermediary rights was never acted upon in full. Mukherjee's own study provides a few instances contrary to the general principle. It is to be particularly noted that the settlements made in the first decade of the nineteenth century in the three districts of Tanjore, Trichinopoly and Tinnevely (in each of which mirasi right was said to be well-established) were actually variations of a village settlement, and the head inhabitants evidently tried their best to thwart the progress of any ryotwari settlement superseding them as intermediaries². Moreover, the impression one gets from the joint article of N. Mukherjee and R. E. Frykenberg is that there was no largescale violation of the well-established land rights even during the early ryotwari experiments³. During the village lease system fol-

1 See Nilmani Mukherjee, *The Ryotwari System in Madras 1792-1827* (Calcutta, 1962), p. 200.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

3 See R. E. Frykenberg (ed.), *The Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* (Madison, 1969), pp. 217-226.

lowing the initial experiments, the principle was even reversed as major intermediaries were then preferred as renters.⁴

Whatever be the attitude of the government towards the intermediary land rights and its effects during the early ryotwari and lease systems, the principle of denying all other land rights other than occupational right was definitely rejected prior to the introduction of the revised ryotwari system in the 1820s. As early as 1817, the government decided that ryotwari settlement should not in any way trench on the rights of the mirasidars and others in the soil. It, however, did not preclude a settlement with the actual occupiers of land.⁵

The result was a certain kind of confusion about the meaning and nature of landownership in Tamilnadu during the period under discussion. Landownership meant, from the legal point of view, two different things in parts of Tamilnadu. In areas where mirasi land rights existed and were socially recognized, landownership implied nothing less than a superior proprietary ownership, which was independent of the pattaholding right of cultivating and paying the revenue for the land concerned. Such a proprietor could also be a pattaholder; but pattaholding was not an essential condition of his ownership right. Hence it legally existed even in the case of his default of revenue payment. By contrast, in the non-mirasi areas, ownership right belonged to anyone who paid land revenue for a specific plot of land. However, in default, such right ceased to exist. Clearly, here ownership right belonged to a large extent to the actual occupiers of land (which I call occupational right). Both the proprietary and occupational rights over land were transferable by hereditary succession, and if there was a land market, they could even be sold or mortgaged. However, given the prevailing land-man ratio, cultivable dry lands in Tamilnadu were abundant, and were either not salable or were of very little value. Salability was, therefore, not an essential attribute

4 See Mukherjee *op. cit.*, pp 79-80. The village lease system was a contract involving payment of a certain sum for a fixed area, whether cultivated or not, with "the proprietary inhabitants at large" (as the Board of Revenue put it) of each village. In effect, in many cases, the lease settlement was made with the village headmen, and in the absence of strongly organized villages where accounts were well-kept and regular assessments were on record, the tenant's rent became absolutely dependent on the lease-holder's will or consent. See for an account of the lease system, Baden-Powell, *The Land-System of British India*. Vol. III (Oxford, 1892), pp. 25-31.

5 See Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-6.

of landownership. The proprietary right had an additional value in the sense that it was associated with some privileges (to be discussed in the following sections); it could be mortgaged or sold.

In order to understand the nature of the many facets of the ownership right in detail, I shall first make a discussion of various types and categories of the right.

1. *The terms, categories and varieties of landowners*

A. *The definition and nature of the mirasi right*

In most modern south Indian histories, the term mirasidar has been generally explained as a wide, almost undifferentiated mass of privileged landholders, with far-flung rights and control over land and its products.⁶ This has happened mainly because of the heavy dependence on Ellis's collection of papers on the Mirasi Right which was printed by the Madras Government in 1818, and which focussed and then upheld the rights and privileges of the mirasidars in their pristine purity.⁷ The report was written in the form of answers to seventeen questions on the subject. As Ellis was regarded as the staunchest official supporter of the mirasi right, and his views were often quoted by the subsequent revenue and judicial authorities, the study heavily depends on him for an explanation of the right, though other source materials have also been used.

Mirasi was defined by Ellis in the following words. "The word miras, originally signifying inheritance, is in southern India employed as a general term to designate a variety of rights, differing in nature and degree but all more or less connected with the proprietary possession or instruct, of the soil, or its produce."⁸ Essentially mirasi was a privileged right to the possession of land, carrying with it heritable, almost exclusive right of sale and purchase. There were differences of opinion regarding its origin, though it was agreed that it originated from some form of favourable tenure. One account saw the origin of

6 For example, D. A. Washbrook has used the term mirasidar in this sense in his *The emergence of provincial politics, the Madras Presidency 1870-1920* (Cambridge, 1976 and New Delhi, 1977), Chap. III.

7. See the *Replies to the Seventeen Questions proposed by the Govt. of St. George relative to the Mirasi Right* (hereafter *Mirasi Right*; Madras, 1818). The book includes Ellis's note and answers with special reference to the region traditionally known as Tondaimandalam along with another set of answers by Sancaraya, the *sheristadar* of the Collectorate of Madras, and an appendix specially prepared by Ellis.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 1, para 2.

the system in the favourable land tenure granted by the ruler Tondiman to encourage settlement in certain parts of Chingleput and Arcot.⁹ Ellis believed that it was from the first settlement of the country, "when the rights and its incidents were well established", that the first possessors and their presumptive assignees in *pangus* (shares) were holding *mirasi*.¹⁰ Munro held that the system developed out of the particularities of wet agriculture for which the construction of tanks and water works at a considerable expense was a pre-requisite; for regular cultivation in this context, the cultivators were charged with a moderate revenue and were given hereditary landed right.¹¹

It is important to note the main features of the *mirasi* privilege. First of all, the privilege was independent of revenue-paying liability for the land concerned. "Mirasi right is not forefeited, by the discontinuance of cultivation for a single year, or any longer period, during the life of the mirasidar, his son or his grandson."¹² The result was that the mirasidar could claim the possession of the land at any time within 100 years after he had left it. The government could only temporarily give the lands to others for cultivation in the absence of the mirasidar.¹³ Secondly, since the *mirasi* right did not lapse even when the land concerned remained uncultivated, it was widely believed that the *mirasi* right extended to the waste lands, subject only to the nature of the waste.¹⁴ The mirasidar had the sole right over all *sheycal karambu* or cultivable waste which he held along with his *varapesa* or taxable lands of the village; as for the *anadi karambu* or immemorial waste their right was partial. Here also, they possessed "the exclusive right of cutting firewood, working quarries etc.", though they had no right for cultivation, break up common used for pasturage, or to cut down productive trees.¹⁵ Thirdly, the *mirasi* right was superior to all other tenural rights. As a result, both the *ulkudi* and *parakudi* tenures were said to be subordinate tenuers under the *mirasi*; and irrespective of the rights of these tenures over cultivation and holding of land, they were not proprietary in the *mirasi* regions. Even

9 Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India* (Cambridge, 1965), p. 14.

10 *Mirasi Right*, p. 11, fn. 28

11 Dharma Kumar, *op. cit.*, pp 14-15.

12 *Mirasi Right*, p. 9.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

15 *Ibid.*

the *ulkudi* tenants who were said to have heritable holding right were declared unable to transfer land "by sale, mortgage or otherwise", for such rights were vested in the mirasidars.¹⁶

Personally Ellis believed in the concept of absolute superiority of the mirasi right, binding the holder "to no service", independent even of the revenue authorities.¹⁷ He, however, mentioned a number of conditions to be fulfilled by the mirasidar, failing which the right ceased to be valid. For example, the immunity from forfeiture of the mirasi would not be valid, at least temporarily, if the mirasidar failed to bring under cultivation his share of the *varpet* [taxable land], or abandoned agriculture without providing for its culture by *parakudis* or tenants.¹⁸ In such cases, the government had the right to employ *parakudis*, for a year or more but not indefinitely, and "perhaps, to resume his mirasi *swatantryams* [fees] in proportion to the extent of land he has neglected to cultivate."¹⁹ Similarly, as for the mirasi right over waste land, Ellis categorically spoke of its limited nature, so that the mirasidars could not change the *tarapadi* accounts, in which the lands were distributed according to their several descriptions, either waste or cultivated. Indeed, the "mirasi right is confined to the use of these as they exist, no alteration can be made with respect to them by the mirasidars; . . . they have no inherent right to do so, [but] with the consent of the circar any beneficial change in the appropriation of lands may take place."²⁰ Thus the nature of the mirasi right was such as to involve certain corresponding duties, or to make the right operative only under certain conditions.

B *The variations of the mirasi right*

The privileges associated with the mirasi right varied from place to place. As a hereditary right to the possession of land, the mirasi (or its Tamil equivalent *kaniyatchi*) landholder was supposed to enjoy *mereis*—fees at various rates received in kind from the general produce, and sometimes other privileges including the *maniyam* or land free of

16 *Ibid.*, p. 34

17 See Ellis's personal note on the mirasi right, in *Miscellaneous Volume of the Board of Revenue on land tenure*, No. 233, Appendix ("final remark").

18 *Mirasi Right*, p. 10. For a detailed later critique of the mirasi right on the waste land, see Bayley, *Memorandum on Mirasi Tenures* (Madras, 1856), particularly pp. 6-9.

19 *Mirasi Right*, p. 10.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

tax²¹ In areas traditionally known as Tondaimandalam (extending from the limits of Nellore nearly to the Coleroon and comprising North Arcot, South Arcot and Chingleput), mirasi was identical with *kaniyatchmaniyam* or a certain extent of land free of all assessment and the privileges of receiving various fees like *cuppatam*, *canimerei*, *calpaḍi*, *calbasam* from the gross produce of all taxable land.²² Free landholding probably originated in the favour shown by the government to the first settlers, but the privilege was defunct in most places by early British rule. Thus Ellis commented: "The original *kaniyatchi* is held by Brahmins, Reddis, Pallis, Shanars and others; where, however, the *kaniyatchi* has thus passed from the original holders, it frequently happens that the present owners do not enjoy the *kaniyatchiamaniyam* ... possessing only *varapet* [taxable] lands."²³

As landlord's right everywhere, the mirasidars used to get *tanduvaram* (a certain portion of the *kudivaram* or cultivator's share of the produce) and *swamibhogam* (the rent paid for the land in farm) from all land cultivated by *payakaris* or persons not mirasidars.²⁴ Whereas in Chingleput *swamibhogam* in many cases was enjoyed in addition to *kaniyatchmaniyam*, in areas south of the Coleroon (i.e. in Tanjore and other southern districts) all lands except the official *maniyam* were *varapet* or taxable, and the mirasi privilege was said to be limited to the enjoyment of *swamibhogam*.²⁵ The difference was not merely one of tenural nature; it also indicated the strength with which the mirasi right was exercised in the two areas. As the mirasidars virtually controlled their land in Tanjore, the enjoyment of

21 *Ibid.*

22 The various fees mentioned were all grain fees received in three ways: "in the straw before thrashing, in grain measuring and from the government share after division" *Ibid.*, fn. 6.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 3, fn. 5.

24 According to the sheristadar B. Sancaraya's explanation, *tanduvaram* and *swamibhogam* were often used synonymously to mean the portion of the produce enjoyed by the landlord, though there was a distinction. *Ibid.*, p. 40, fn. 6. Sundararaja Iyengar explains: "*Tanduvaram* is a certain portion of the *kudivaram* fixed by custom or agreement, paid by the *payakaris* from the produce of all lands cultivated by them to the mirasidars; sometimes in grain, sometimes in money and *swamibhogam* is the rent paid for the land held in farm from the mirasidar for fixed period. *Tanduvaram* literally means a bit of share, and *swamibhogam* the shares paid to the *swami* or proprietor." See Sundararaja Iyengar, *Land Tenures in the Madras Presidency* (Madras, 1916), p. 48.

25 *Mirasi Right*, p. 3, para 5.

swamibhogam was almost universal; while in Chingleput and South Arcot, it was occasionally questioned and *kaniyatchimaniyam* was thought a more secure mirasi privilege.

It has been said that the mirasi right, "originally at least", was a communal right of landholding.²⁶ Most of the mirasi villages, it is believed, were jointly held in the beginning, but the system underwent a number of modifications in course of time.²⁷ When Ellis commented on the right, a three-fold division of it was apparent. First, there were *pasangkarei* or joint proprietary villages where the whole lands were "held jointly and either cultivated in common or divided yearly or at some other fixed period, according to established custom, among the proprietors".²⁸ Strictly speaking, there were two types of joint proprietary villages—absolute *pasangkarei* and *kareiyedu*.²⁹ Under the former, the mirasi of the entire cultivated area in a village belonged to a the whole body of mirasidars, while the individuals were entitled to share in the common property according to the share or parts of the share held by them. In these absolutely joint proprietary villages, cultivation was done either by joint stock, labour, cattle and implements or separately. In both cases, the produce was finally shared by all the mirasidars according to their respective shares. "The only separated land which they could hold was the garden or backyard attached to their houses and situated within the limits of the village site."³⁰ Under the *kareiyedu* form of *pasangkarei* villages, lands were separately cultivated by the co-sharers only on a temporary basis and were subject to redistribution at stated periods so that each got good and bad lands in turn. Actual inter-change of cultivated lands at the interval of seven, ten and twelve years was a common feature of this tenure.³¹ Secondly, in the *arudikarei* form of mirasi tenure, lands were held "in severalty and subject, consequently, to no periodical distribution".³² Each family enjoyed a distinct portion of land in perpetuity and was entitled to the exclusive ownership of wells and other water-resources belonging to its share.³³ Here the payment of government revenue was an individual liability.³⁴ By contrast, in the

26 Dharma Kumar, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Mirasi Right*, p. 2, para 4.

29 See Sundararaja Iyengar, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

31 *Mirasi Right* (Sancaraya's answer), p. 47

32 *Ibid.*, p. 2, para 4.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

34 See Sundararaja Iyengar, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

pasangkarei, each person was entitled only to a certain share of the produce, except when it was of *nattam* or house gardens, during the general redivision after the harvest,³⁵ and there was the joint liability of shareholders for government revenue.³⁶ Finally, there were *ekabhagam* villages, where the whole lands were the sole property of a single mirasidar.³⁷ In Tanjore, these villages were mostly hamlets or detached portions of villages which had been constituted as individual mirasi holding prior to British rule, and were called after the mirasidar's own or other favourite name.³⁸

It is relevant to have an idea of the relative strength of the three types of mirasi tenure. Undoubtedly, the *ekabhagam* mirasi tenure was strongest in the sense that here privilege was enjoyed by a single person and not shared by others, and that only the mirasidar of importance obtained the sanction of such a privilege.³⁹ Moreover, all the three types of mirasi landholding were heritable but all were not equally salable. Strictly speaking, the absolute *pasangkarei* right was not salable, while the *kareiyedu pasangkarei* right can be sold or mortgaged easily, and the *ekabhagam* holder might freely sell or otherwise dispose of all, or of part of his village.⁴¹ However, if sold partly, the *ekabhagam* right would become the *arudikarei* right.⁴² It is difficult to speak exactly of the areal distribution of these mirasi tenures in Tamilnadu : we know only that more than 83 per cent of the total mirasi villages in Tanjore had the sole property and severally distributed rights while only 41 per cent of the mirasi villages in South Arcot had similar rights.⁴³ Purely salable and stronger rights thus existed in Tanjore than in South Arcot.

35 Same as no 33.

36 Same as no 34.

37 *Mirasi Right*, p. 3, para 4.

38 Same as no 34.

39 *Ibid.*

40 "In all cases, the property right or privileges which is (sic) not heritable is not mirasi, but mirasi may exist without being transferable". *Mirasi Right*, p. 6. Also, Sundararaja Iyengar, p. 47.

41 See Bayley and Hudleston, *Papers on Mirasi Right* (Madras, 1862), p. 95, para 24.

42 *Ibid.*

43 Out of 4783 mirasi villages in Tanjore in 1805 the sole proprietary and severally distributed mirasi villages amounted to 4009 villages, see D. Kumar, *op. cit.*, p. 16; and in South Arcot, out of 3036 villages 1364 belonged to these categories, see *Hyde's Report* (S. Arcot, 1904), para 17.

Broadly speaking, the mirasi rights could be grouped under three major zonal types on the basis of their nature in general. The first type, with mostly strong and secure rights, could be found in the Kaveri delta area of Tanjore, Tambraparni riverine zone of Tinneveli, and in parts of the wet taluks of Trichinopoly. Here the mirasidars were the pattadars, the official revenue payers, and were cultivating through tenant and/or attached labour. One indication of the strength of the mirasidars of these areas was the ease with which their ownership claims were realised. This means that they were mostly the pattadars, that their ownership right was rarely questioned, through litigation or otherwise, and that the violation of the *swamibhogam* payment was relatively infrequent. Here the villages were without *panguvali*, where the mirasidar had the full right to transfer their land.⁴⁴ The second type of mirasidars were those whose rights were only partly accepted, and even occasionally challenged. This group was found in most districts where mirasi was extensively claimed to exist—Chingleput, South Arcot, parts of Tinneveli, Madurai and probably Trichinopoly. Here pattas were frequently issued in the name of *payakaris* or non-mirasidars, and the legality of the mirasi proprietorship was questioned in the judicial courts. Practically speaking, the alleged mirasi right over waste land in these districts turned out to be an issue on which confrontation in the court and outside became imminent.⁴⁵ Finally, there were mirasidars in all marginally wet areas of all the districts. Their rights were most vulnerable and doubtful.⁴⁶ We shall try to explain some of these different types in section 2.

44 The word *panguvali* was particularly current in Tinneveli, and was distinguishable from *perumbut* or *bamirasi*, both of which mean villages in which "no man has a right to transfer the land he cultivates to any other person". See Board's Consultation (hereafter Board's Cons) 19 Oct 1837, Back No (hereafter BN) 51, Proceedings of Board of Revenue Volume (hereafter BOR Vol.) 1578, p. 12897.

45 This was particularly evident from the immense number of petitions. court case etc. relating to the period under discussion.

46 There is evidence that even non-mirasi villages were sometimes passing as mirasi. The Collector of Tinneveli reported in 1836 that there were "many of the villages where there was no mirasi, and that in the taluk of Nadumandalam . . . it was discovered that 28 villages passing as mirasi no mirasi really existed". Board's Cons 29 August 1836, BN 55, BOR Vol. 1518, in pp. 11793-807.

C. *The extent of continuity of the circumstances which made the mirasi rights what they were*

Whatever be their origins, the mirasi rights continued to exist because of certain circumstances. The original *pangu* settlement of wet lands was no doubt disturbed by sale, transfer and desertion through ages, but the continuance of the rights was possible because of government recognition and social acceptance. Much depended, therefore, on the extent to which these rights were being respected by the government and the people. Arguing from the point that mirasi right should always be respected by the government, Ellis regretted that there were many instances in which "the officers of government have not respected the rights of the mirasidars", a fact which was partly due to "its incompatibility with the interest of the native servants of government, to which fixed rights and known demands must ever be inimical."⁴⁷ He was aware that even before the establishment of British rule in the late 18th and 19th centuries, the right had suffered erosion due to 'ignorance' or 'inattention' on the part of the government⁴⁸. He did not elaborate the effects of the erosion. But it was an established fact that, due to the political trouble of the 18th century, the mirasi right was either cut short or "eliminated" in areas particularly affected by the plunder of the *poligars* (military chieftains) and *cavilgars* (traditional village police).⁴⁹ During the early experiments with the ryotwari system, again, the mirasi rights were not always officially respected.⁵⁰ Then the government accepted as a principle to respect the mirasi for the revised ryotwari settlements in the early 1820s. What exactly was the practice?

First of all, it should be remembered that Ellis's *Mirasi Right* did not represent the strict official point of view. The initial official attitude was ambivalent. By the beginning of 1822, the Court of

47 *Mirasi Right*, pp. 11-12.

48 *Ibid*, p. 12.

49 For the effects of the *poligar* plunder on the mirasi rights, see Stain, 'Agrarian Integration in South India' in Frykerberg (ed., 1969), *op. cit.*, As for the instance of the temporary elimination of the *agraharam* mirasi in a village in Tirumangalam taluk in Madurai in the late 18th century as a result of the plunder of the *cavilgars* and *kallars*, and the complaint against it by the returning mirasidars to the government in 1820, see Bd's Cons 4 December 1820, BN 35, BOR Vol. 872, pp. 10366-96.

50 See Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-17.

Directors categorically observed : the mirasi questions "should be decided not upon *one man's opinion*, but by a consideration of all the information that can be obtained [*italics mine*]".⁵¹ Subsequently, the Board of Revenue which once recommended the printing of Ellis's papers "for the use of Service at large", informed the Court that the papers were never intended as instructions to the Collectors.⁵² In their Proceedings of April 14, 1823, the Board of Revenue concluded : "The right in land, termed mirasi, is in the opinion of the Board nothing more than the right to occupation, so long as the cultivation is duly provided for, and the rent regularly paid; when this is not done, the security of the public revenue requires that the land should be made over to others, who will fulfil the conditions".⁵³ The Court of Directors endorsed this viewpoint, even against the opposition of the government of Madras, which forwarded the proceedings without comment to the Court after three years.⁵⁴

Everything depended, however, on how the actual ryotwar settlements were made. To what extent were the mirasi rights recognised and strengthened by the conclusion of land revenue settlements in the 1820s? The government stand varied with the strength of the mirasiders. The question of ignoring them did not arise at all in areas where their rights were well-established and actually respected, as in deltaic Tanjore. Mostly the mirasidars were involved in the land revenue settlements in this district.⁵⁵ This was probably also true of parts of Tinneveli and Trichinopoly where mirasi was similarly established.⁵⁶ For two other districts, South Arcot and Chingleput, where the mirasidars claimed that the right existed as well, the situation seems to have been different. Already in 1821, the Collector of South Arcot doubted if the mirasi right was a proprietary right in the district. "They do not appear to have had the power of ejecting any tenant from his occupied lands or to exercise any rights of a

51 See the despatch of the Court of Directors from England to Madras, dated 2 January 1822, quoted in Bayley, *op. cit.*, p. 6, para 18.

52 Board's Cons 17 January 1816, quoted in Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, p. 217; the stand was changed in the Board's letter to the government, dated 11 December 1823, quoted in Bayley, *op. cit.*, para 19.

53 Quoted in Bayley, p. 9 para 22.

54 *Ibid.*

55 This is also evident from the fact that the proportion of pattadars in the total population was smaller here than in other districts.

56 The mirasi was most well-entrenched in those parts of Tinneveli and Trichinopoly where "slave" labour coexisted with it.

landlord, by increasing or modifying the rents of the *ulkudis* or *parakudis* within their mirasis: and although the mirasidars vaguely and indefinitely avert that the whole of the cultivated and arable waste lands within their mirasis appertain to themselves, yet I am persuaded that their right over such lands, merely extends to the *marahs* [or *mercis*], that with the exception of the identical lands they themselves occupy, their rights to the remaining soil do not apply in a proprietary sense".⁵⁷ The Governor-in-Council in his comment on the report "hoped" that the mirasidars were mostly the actual occupants, but categorically added that long-relinquished traditional rights should be ignored and only those rights which had been lost during the decennial or triennial leases should be revived.⁵⁸ In Chingleput, the mirasidars were dissatisfied ever since the beginning of the survey and settlement in the early 1820s.⁵⁹ Pattas were issued even to the non-mirasidars; and by the end of 1822 the mirasidars even petitioned, demanding—*inter alia*—the payment of the *mamul* privilege to the original mirasider of the village when the unoccupied ground of him was given to others, "whether he be a mirasidar or *payakari*".⁶⁰ Very soon the Board commented that the mirasi in the district was nothing but the right of occupation.⁶¹ Earlier, the Board thus commented on the relinquishment of the land by the mirasidars: "no ryot whether he be mirasidar or *payakari* can be allowed to throw up the land of his farm and retain the good; he must either throw up the whole or retain a portion of each..."⁶² And as for the waste land, the "government have an undisputed right to draw the revenue from it, and if the mirasidars refused to contribute their agency towards the production of the revenue, the temporary right to this land at least passes from them..."⁶³ This stand, as noted later, led to innumerable conflicts in future.

57 See Hyde's *Report on the Introduction of a Ryotwari Settlement into the South Arcot Collectorate and the correspondence relating thereto* (The Collectorate Press, S. Arcot, 1904), p. 3.

58 Board's Cons 30 July 1821, BN 45, BOR Vol. 891, para 3, in pp. 6856-59.

59 Board's Cons 4 November 1822, BN 18, para 11, BOR Vol. 929, in pp. 10082-10128.

60 *Ibid.*, para 6, pp. 10129-34.

61 Board's Cons 14 April 1823, BN 19, para 17, BOR Vol. 873, pp. 10921-942.

62 Board's Cons 28 December 1820, BN 21, para 20, BOR Vol. 873.

63 *Ibid.*, para 28.

As far as the question of the mirasi rights being respected by the people in the absence of government recognition was concerned, Ellis's answer was in the affirmative. "It was within my knowledge that in certain districts, where the entire of the *varapet* lands have passed from the mirasidars and are now cultivated by the *parakudis* under government renters, that the mirasiders retained possession of their *maniyams*, and I believe . . . their *mereis* and other privileges".⁶⁴ This also indicated Ellis's belief in the superiority of the mirasi right the possession of which was regarded as a mark of social respect "flattered by the lead they take in the festivals and all other concerns [of] the people and the precedence which is always readily allowed [to] them".⁶⁵ Ellis was, however, aware of the fact that the mirasi right was not always popularly accepted. First of all, the *ulkudi payakaris* were in many places successful not only in possessing the whole *varapet* of the village but also in usurping the mirasi right itself.⁶⁶ Secondly, in some villages in the *arudikarei*, mirasi right was actually held by the *ulkudis*, a fact inconsistent with the claims of the representatives of the former mirasidars.⁶⁷ Finally, there was a unique case of "conversion of property by which a mirasidar in an *arudikarei* village make over the possession, right of transfer and all other mirasi privileges to a stranger and constitute himself a permanent *payakari* by retaining the right of cultivation and the customary shares of the produce".⁶⁸

It therefore, appears both from Ellis and other sources that in the early nineteenth century circumstances which made the mirasi rights what they were considerably tended to change. A result of the different, rather ambivalent, government views on the mirasi right was the continuous existence, claimed or real, of the various types of mirasidars in Tamilnadu during the period under discussion. Simultaneously, there was a gradual erosion of the social acceptance of the mirasi rights in certain areas, leading to innumerable litigations. Consequently, claims and conflicts over landownership took a new turn which will be discussed subsequently.

D. *The nature of the rights of the non-mirasi landholders*

A striking aspect of the non-mirasi landownership in Tamilnadu in the early nineteenth century was the absence of privileges and special

64 *Mirasi Right*, pp. 12-13.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

67 *Ibid.*

68 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

rights. This is understandable. All landholding except that of the mirasidars clearly rested on the condition of occupation and cultivation of land, involving the obligation of a regular payment of the government revenue demand. The theory of ryotwari system also assumed this kind of landownership.

Indeed, the ryotwari system by implication conferred ownership right on any "ryot" who paid land revenue to the government for any amount of land and held a patta in return, provided that no superior land right existed there. By this standard, the bulk of the ryots or more properly, pattadars, were landowners in Tamilnadu, at least in the five districts of Salem, Coimbatore, North Arcot, South Arcot and Madurai, where mirasi was either non-existent or only partly and rather doubtfully accepted. Non-mirasi landholding right, therefore, seems to have prevailed very extensively under the ryotwari system.

In practice, there were two important qualifications of the ryotwari-based right of landownership. First, a substantial portion of the pattaholding landowners were very small owner-cultivators and were indeed marginal owners, so that even their occupation of the small plot of land they cultivated was of very short duration. Their landholding was limited to cultivation in good seasonal conditions only. Secondly, and partly related to the first, the value of land in large parts of dry areas was so low that land market was almost non-existent. The result was that the right of landownership in such conditions was nothing but the right to continue cultivation without the formal interference of superior land rights.

Substantial ownership right, however, was not lacking. There were large landholders in each of the major non-mirasi districts, and some of their rights over land were more than mere occupational in nature. Particularly garden, wet and better dry lands were valuable and transferable, at least in certain parts of Tamilnadu. Where the owners had no property right for the common dry land without wells, they had the right called *adhinam* for garden, dry without a well or such lands.⁶⁹ This right was such that it was not vitiated by time or absence, which sometimes resulted in the fact that some of the finest lands were either unoccupied or under-rented.⁷⁰ Yet the Board of

69 Board's Cons 24 August 1835 BOR Vol. 1465, para 11, in pp. 9358-9407.

70 Board's Cons 13 May 1822, BN 35, BOR Vol. 912, paras 8-9.

Revenue commented that such right of property, that is to say, the right of the proprietors in spite of the absence, should be continued.⁷¹ Here the proprietary right meant the right over land which was somehow valuable; in fact, the traditional usage of having a complete proprietary right by one who dug a well in Coimbatore was reiterated by the British.⁷²

It is not clear to what extent such a proprietary right of non-mirasidars was found in other districts as well; at least no such right was recognized by the government.⁷³ But there is no doubt that all valuable lands belonging to non-mirasidars were transferable.⁷⁴ Here salability was an additional attribute of the occupational right.

All the non-mirasi landholders can further be divided into two general categories—*ulkudis* and *parakudis*. These two words had, however, not the same meaning everywhere. These two terms meant two distinct tenures in mirasi areas. Here *ulkudi* meant a cultivator, distinguishable from a proprietor, who had inherited the land he cultivated, and could not be dispossessed as long as he paid the stipulated rent.⁷⁵ In Chingleput district, they had a sort of life interest in the land they cultivated, and though they could not sell, mortgage or transfer their lands, their children could succeed to them, and only if they failed to pay rent punctually, the lands reverted to the landlord (mirasidar).⁷⁶ On the other hand, a *parakudi* (or *payakari* in some districts) in mirasi areas meant a temporary cultivator, one who cultivated the lands of another for a stipulated term and was given a share of the crop. Their rights were never hereditary nor transferable by sale or otherwise and unless special agreements were entered into, the right ceased with the period of contract.⁷⁷ In non-mirasai areas, however, the two terms, *ulkudis* and *parakudis* had different meanings. The *ulkudis* were the residential cultivators with full occupational right.

71 Board's Cons 17 June 1822, BN 40, BOR Vol. 917, para 6, in pp 5840-44.

72 Bd's Cons 27 April 1826, BN 30, BOR Vol. 1061, para 6, in pp. 3947-54.

73 I have not seen any evidence that government accepted non-mirasi land rights notwithstanding the long "absence" of the non-mirasidars; indeed in South Arcot the government categorically ignored such rights even of mirasidars, leading to innumerable court cases discussed in the following section.

74 This is proved by *Land Registration Records* (in Tamil), covering the non mirasi districts.

75 See Sundararaja Iyengar, *op cit.*, p. 231.

76 *Ibid.*

77 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

The *parakudis* were migratory or non-resident cultivators, were not members of the village community and had no proprietary rights, but held and cultivated lands in the village either for a stipulated term or as long as they wanted.⁷⁸ The *parakudis* were generally encouraged by the revenue authorities in all those areas where the land-man ratio was extremely favourable. In Trichinopoly there were even concessionary terms of land revenue for them : in the three dry taluks of Ariyalore, Udaiyarpalaiyam and Volkondapuram which were comparatively sparsely populated parts of the district, the non-resident pattaholders paid at a lower rate than the resident ones.⁷⁹ The rate varied from one-half to three-fourths of the assessed revenue. The privilege was, however, later restricted to only those *parakudis* residing at a distance of three miles and above from the field.⁸⁰ There were probably two reasons for the restriction of the privilege in the early 1840s. First, even the *ulkudi* cultivators tried to get the *parakudi* privilege in the neighbouring villages. Secondly, the rates of population growth in the above-mentioned three taluks, particularly Volkondapuram, were higher than the district rate during the period between 1830-31 and 1842-43 : the rate in the district as a whole being 32 per cent and that in Volkondapuram 64 per cent.⁸¹ The actual rate of population growth might be lower,⁸² but there is no doubt that the population increased at a greater rate in Volkondapuram and that this might have led the authorities to restrict the original *parakudi* privilege.

The practice of allowing land (mainly cultivable waste) to be cultivated through *cowles* or concessionary rates was prevailing everywhere, particularly in Salem and Coimbatore; but *cowle* pattas did not provide any ownership right to the holders.⁸³ It was purely a

78 *Ibid.*

79 Bd's Cons 9 July 1835, BN Vol. 1459, para 14, in pp. 7293-7319.

80 See the *jamabandi hukumnama* for Fasli 1251 (1841-42), para 21, in Board's Cons 5 August 1841, BN 36, BOR Vol 1763, in pp 9676-99.

81 See Bd's Cons 21 February 1831, BN 46, BOR Vol 1278, pp. 2135-38; and Bd's Cons 19 October 1843, BN 68, No. 2, BOR Vol. 1883, pp. 15365-68.

82 For various reasons of exaggerated population figures, see my unpublished Ph.D. thesis, *The Agrarian Economy of Tamilnadu, 1820 1855* (submitted to the University of Calcutta, July 1978), chapter III.

83 This is evident from the various terms and conditions of the issue of the *cowle* pattas, fixed from time to time by different *cowlenamas*. In most cases the duration of a *cowle* was about four to five years, after which full land revenue was collected. There was no question of owning *cowle* land at a fixed privileged rate. See, for example, two *cowlenamas* of Salem for 1830-31 and 1832-33 in Board's Cons 3 Jan 1831, BN 73, BOR Vol. 1273, pp. 511-20; 13 Sep. 1832, Bor 22, Encls 7-8, BOR Vol 1338, p. 9273.

temporary occupational privilege, and not a permanent right. *Cowle* lands were not transferable.

2. *The claims and conflicts over landownership, c. 1820 to 1855*

The question of landownership has been discussed so far more or less in terms of various rights and privileges. Far more important, however, is a study of actual practices in different regions. It had particular relevance to all those areas where the superior rights of mirasi were constantly challenged, sometimes even usurped by the holders of the non-mirasi tenures who claimed landownership for themselves.

The study of the various claims and conflicts in this section particularly relates to those areas where such conflicts were more frequent. Such areas were in fact those in which the second and third types of mirasidars mentioned earlier (section 1B) existed with less secure or insecure rights. They were mostly confined to Chingleput, South Arcot, parts of Tinneveli and Madurai.

It was the mirasi claim over waste land which was most vigorously challenged and contested, particularly in South Arcot and Chingleput. The government had never accepted this right in its entirety in these districts. But the real background of the conflicts was the fact that cultivable waste was extensive or even increasing in these districts.^{83a} The available materials for Chingleput suggest the existence of extensive waste lands in the district as early as 1820,⁸⁴ and the *nanjai* waste was increasing in the 1840s. As far as South Arcot was concerned, a great portion of *punjai* lands lay waste between 1834-35 and 1843-44.⁸⁵ Under such conditions, the occupational right was generally asserted by those who continued to 'propose' for cultivable waste, and such claims were increasingly endorsed by the officials, while the mirasi right was being ignored.

83a. This background has been completely ignored by S. S. Sivakumar when he writes that the serious conflict "between the payakarais and kaniyatchikarars" in Tendaimandalam in the nineteenth century was merely "the outcome of the imposition of the ryotwari system of land tenure". See S. S. Sivakumar, 'Transformation of the Agrarian Economy in Tondaimandalam: 1760-1900' in *Social Scientist*, Vol 6, No 10 (May 1978), p 27.

84 See Bd's Cons 9 November 1820, BN 33, BOR Vol 871, para 26, in pp 9634-9746.

85 Board's Cons 30 March 1846, BN 50, No 4, BOR Vol 2018, in pp. 4830-32.

In Chingleput, the conflict occurred in 1839 when the mirasidars of Wooroor disposed of the long tract extending from a *kuppam* (= a village of small houses and huts) and facing the seashore, and the question arose if the mirasidars had the right to sell the *poramboke* or immemorial waste lands.⁸⁶ The Collector of the district argued that except *kuppatams* or some grain fees, and the privilege of grazing their cattle, the mirasidar had no other right on such lands; and he sent the case to the Board of Revenue arguing that "everyday brings forward some fresh reason to show the necessity of having a general and defined rule on the subject."⁸⁷

The conflict developed with further legal confusion in 1840 when the Collector of the district appealed to the Provincial Court, Central Division in order to revoke the order of the Chingleput Zilla Court which denied the right of government to grant immemorial waste.⁸⁸ The original suit, dated 1836, involved the Christian *payakaris* of the village Kannentongle, who had been given 80 *cawnis* (=about 106 acres) of land in accordance with their proposal superseding the claim of the Iyengar and Naik mirasidar on the whole. The main point in the dispute was whether the waste land could not legally be given to *payakaris* without the consent of the mirasidars. But the Provincial Court confirmed the decree of the zilla court.

In spite of the court judgement, there is reason to believe that the *payakaris* continued to get cultivable waste for cultivation. This is evident from the particular circumstances under which some waste land was granted to a *payakari* of the village Mangad, near Poonamallee, but later withdrawn.⁸⁹ It was specifically stated that the *payakari* got the land when the mirasidar did not cultivate it because of the lack of adequate water supply. The grant was later withdrawn as the mirasidar agreed to cultivate even under the prevailing conditions.

86 Board's Cons 28 July 1839, BN 27, BOR Vol 1666, paras 1-2, in pp. 9735-38.

87 *Ibid.*, paras 4-5.

88 Board's Cons 3 January 1842, BN 43, BOR Vol 1788, in pp 130-143.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 143. However, the Collector of the district, A. Trease, solicited the authority of the Board of Revenue for going to the Sadar Adalat for the admission of a special appeal.

90 Board's Cons 28 January 1852. BN 52, BOR Vol 2332, in pp. 7474-81. The Board, however, did like the idea that a patta given in the case of an accepted *darkast* or proposal was by the nature of the grant an occupational right for the year only. "This would appear opposed to the remarks of the government (extract Minutes of Consultation 24 July 1849) that if the lands are transferred to the *darkastdar* they should be made over on permanent patta on the same terms as to ordinary ryots."

The result was that the *payakari* continued to cultivate, not as an "owner" but as an occupant only at the discretion of the mirasidar, Iyaswami Moodeli, who paid an annual revenue of Rs. 7925.

But the last case was unique in the sense that it involved a very big mirasidar against the *payakari* and that the former finally gave consent to pay revenue for the piece of waste land. In innumerable other cases in Chingleput on the subject, both these particulars might be lacking. Throughout the period, the Board was not prepared to recognise mirasi in *purambaku* (land incapable of cultivation) in the district, and as late as 1854 they maintained the same stand.⁹¹ Indeed, as the petition of the *payakaris* of Puttrapermattur in the Peddapolliyam taluk indicated in 1840, pattas were rarely issued for *sheycal* or cultivable waste lands in the name of the mirasidars, except in cases where immemorial waste were brought under cultivation by them.⁹² It meant that the *payakaris* continued to have a functional holding right over such lands.

Similarly, the mirasi claim on the waste land in South Arcot was seriously challenged, particularly in the 1830s and 1840s. As early as 1827, Campbell, a member of the Board of Revenue, observed that the system of giving to other parties land left waste by the mirasidars operated to the "gradual ousting" of the former, and the Collector in reply virtually defended the system.⁹³ The mirasidars themselves did not oppose the distribution of the waste by the government as such, provided their own undertenants and slaves did not become owners⁹⁴. The condition was important. The mirasidars well realised that once their slaves and undertenants could cultivate land of their own, their hold over them would be weakened. However, the difficulties of obtaining waste by persons including newcomers willing to cultivate, continued even as late as 1838-39.⁹⁵

91 The Board expressed their views when the *sukhavasi* (= literally comfortable; enjoying certain privileges) ryots in the Nayar taluk, who had held lands for periods varying from 10 to 20 years as subtenants of the mirasidars, wanted pattas for cultivating waste lands, but the Collector denied the right of cultivating waste lands without the prior permission of the mirasidars. See Board's Cons 23 February 1854, BN 15, BOR Vol 2408, in pp. 2826-34.

92 See Board's Cons 12 Nov 1840, BN 48, BOR Vol 1728, para 3, in pp. 15530-32. The document also refers to the fact that even *payakaris* held "shares" of a village along with the mirasidars.

93 Board's Cons 1 Nov 1827, BN 49, BOR Vol 1124, in pp. 12978-86.

94 *Ibid.*, para 6.

95 Board's Cons 25 November 1839, BN 35, BOR Vol 1683, para 22, in pp. 17422-40.

Two distinct features marked the disposition of waste land in South Arcot. First, the waste lands actually distributed were mostly cultivable waste, some of which remained uncultivated by the original owners for a few years only. These lands were often valuable, having ponds, productive trees etc., but were left fallow because of sudden seasonal failures, high and unequal rates of assessment and the consequent fear of loss from the cultivation.⁹⁶ Citation from a few court cases will make the point clear. In a dispute over some waste land in Sorappore village in the taluk of Villupuram, the plaintiff stated that he was in occupation of the land for some thirty years up to 1836-37, that it was subsequently waste for two years only due to want of adequate water and that his right of occupancy was forfeited as the land was given to another proposer in 1839-40.⁹⁷ The Collector supported the forfeiture as legal, though the Board thought it an "unnecessarily severe mode of procedure" and refused to allow the suit being defended at the public cost.⁹⁸ In another case (1840), dry land with fruit trees, having been left uncultivated for more than four years in Salupamur village in the taluk of Mannargudi was transferred from the man who obtained a patta for the trees to a new proposer of the land for cultivation, on the ground that the benefit of the trees should go to the cultivator without any payment of tree tax.⁹⁹ Similarly in a case in the village Paramaswarnellore in the taluk of Chidambaram some wet lands were transferred from the original owner to other parties as long-standing waste, but these land were actually used as a pond for long, making it possible for the paddy cultivation in the attached land.¹⁰⁰ Thus the nature of the waste disposed of by the government was different in many places in South Arcot.

Secondly, most of the owners involved in the disposal of waste in the district were actually small or middle owners or mirasidars, and a considerable number of the new proposers in these were not under-

96 *Ibid.*

97 See Board's Cons 30 July 1840, BN 37, BOR Vol 1711, in pp. 9178-80.

98 *Ibid.*, BN 37-38, pp. 9183-84.

99 See the principal Collector's submission of the copy of the plaint and an answer in Board's Cons 13 August 1840, BN 50, BOR Vol 1714, pp. 10274-81.

100 See Board's Cons 24 September 1840, BN 51, BOR Vol 1781, in pp. 12020-31. The plaintiffs in their suit stated that the land in question was low and fit for being a pond and that when the flow of rain water increased it was filled up with water. After paddy plants were plucked up from the land, it was used for the drinking and resting of plough cattle.

tenants in the village concerned, but only owners or mirasidars of other villages. The first is proved by the size of land in the disposal cases, which formed often a *cawni* (=1.32 acres), or often even less, of dry and inferior class of wet and garden lands. We know of a case in which 2/16ths of a *cawni* of garden land was thus disposed of in the village Kanakaraput in the taluk of Chidambaram.¹⁰¹ In another case of village Tundeswaranellore in the same Taluk, only third and fourth sorts of wet lands of a few *cawnis* were involved.¹⁰² The new proposers of land were not necessarily undertenants, for "instances had arisen of ryots having given up their *kyput* [=recorded; regularly assessed] lands in their own villages out of a spirit of opposition"¹⁰³. Moreover, the proposal of *parakudi* undertenants for cultivation of waste lands was refused if the *ulkudis*, the resident occupants and virtual landowners in the absence of accepted mirasi rights, objected.¹⁰⁴ Such objections indeed came to the fore in the well-known case of Alagha Pillay, a *parakudi* vs the government and 6 other defendants in the Panumputtu village in the district.¹⁰⁵ The issue in this case was whether an *ulkudi*, having given a proposal for cultivation and obtained possession of certain waste land for a stipulated period in his village, could transfer it during the first year of cultivation to a *parakudi* without the consent of other *ulkudis* of the village. The Board did not give any opinion on the subject, but the Collector Dent was sure that the practice of the district did not permit any *parakudi* to occupy waste, without first giving option to *ulkudis*.¹⁰⁶ The court finally decided in favour of Alagha Pillay, arguing that "none of the revenue regulations invest a Collector with the power summarily to cancel a transfer such as the one described in the plaint",¹⁰⁷ but the case highlighted the general difficulties in the occupation of waste land by a *parakudi* in the district.

The conflicts over the disposal of waste land in other mirasi districts did not create a serious problem. This was either because

101 Board's Cons 24 Sep 1840, BN 49, BOR Vol 1718, pp. 12000-9.

102 *Ibid.*, BN 50, pp. 12010-19.

103 Board's Progs on land laying waste in South Arcot, in Board's Cons 29 June 1840, BN 28, para 3, BCER Vol 1708, in pp. 7689-93.

104 Board's Cons 15 June 1840, BN 35, BOR Vol 1707, pp. 7285-87. The report refers to a dispute over "a long time waste made over for cultivation to the first proposer". The Collector thought that the proposers were not *parakudis*, "since the *ulkudis* have not objected in the beginning".

105 Board's Cons 17 March 1842, BN 21, BOR Vol 1797, in pp. 3526-35.

106 *Ibid.*, the answer of the Collector relating to the plaint.

107 Board's Cons 5 January 1843, BN 30, BOR Vol 1841, p. 413.

of the fact that there the portion of mirasi landholding lying waste was comparatively small or that the claims of the mirasidars were stronger. In Tanjore, the proportion of the waste of the total land engaged for the cultivation in the *olungu* rented¹⁰⁸ villages generally did not exceed 4.5 per cent of wet lands and 8 per cent of dry and garden lands together.¹⁰⁹ Again, the waste was mostly confined to *kadarambum* (= rainfed) lands, "as it rarely happens that a mirasidar desires for a single season to leave his wet crop land untilled where water for the purpose of culture is procurable".¹¹⁰ Yet the mirasi right in *purambaku* was recognised in Tanjore: "Should proposals be made by others for cultivation of land so thrown up, the choice of resuming the cultivation of it is given to the original occupant and the offer accepted only on his declining to do so."¹¹¹ As late as 1855, the Collector of Tanjore stated that "the practice certainly has been to consider the cirkar right in waste as limited to its regulated share of the produce on any extension of cultivation and no waste land is ever granted to stranger before the mirasidar has been offered and has refused to undertake it".¹¹² As a further explana-

108 The *olungu* system was greatly complicated, Baden-Powell thus sums it up, "...it really reduced itself to a system of computing in money the actual grain-share for the year (valuing it by current prices): the trouble and uncertainty of this being progressively reduced by attempts to arrive at something more like an *average* produce and *average* price for assessment purposes". Baden-Powell adds: "The average estimate of produce was calculated on the outturn of certain given years (according to the district circumstances), and the standard price on the average of certain specified years". The movement of current selling prices compared with the initial standard price were taken into account, in addition to a standard produce, while fixing the land revenue demand in money. See Baden-Powell, *op. cit.*, Vol III p 47.

109 The figures relate to 1831-32, an average, indifferent year. See Board's Cons 13 Sep 1832, BN 28, para 22, BOR Vol 1330, in pp. 9278-312.

110 Board's Cons 17 September 1840, BN 65, BOR Vol. 1717. in pp 11711-12.

111 *Ibid.* It is true that in a contemporary document (Board's Cons 9 Sep 1841, BN 30 BOR Vol 1767, pp. 1126-30), doubts were raised about some aspects of the right: (1) the necessity of the prior consent of the mirasidar in case of his "default of means and desire" (2) the propriety of granting waste to a stranger undertaking it on more favourable terms and (3) the transferability of the waste land by the mirasidar through sale or otherwise to stranger. If later indications are to be believed, these were theoretical rather than practical question, for the practice seemed to be in favour of the right.

112 Board's Cons 8 August 1855, BN 214, para 5, BOR Vol. 2486, in pp. 12684-89.

tion of the right in connection with a memorial of Rungappah Naik of Munnalore over his disputed claim on *purambaku*, the Collector provides some information. "There are two modes of purchasing land in Tanjore, one is termed *gramaudum*, as purchase which entitles the purchaser to a proportionate share in all the waste land of the village, and the other *candracryem*, which gives the purchaser land entered in the deed of sale..."¹¹³ The memorialist's claim was declared valid as his opponent, who became by purchase, as *candracryem*, a landowner in Munnalore, had no claim to share in the village waste.¹¹⁴

Similarly, in Tinneveli waste land on a considerable scale was non-existent in the secure mirasi areas (i.e. the *panguvali* villages, particularly in the Tambrapani river valley), while in the large number of *porumbut* villages no mirasi right on the waste was recognised.¹¹⁵ Others could take such lands on the usual terms.¹¹⁶ Conversely, some questions were raised against the disposal of waste in Madurai district. Such was the case when the Brahmin mirasidars were unwilling both to cultivate and resign some land in Mailmangalam in Tengarai taluk in 1845.¹¹⁷ The indecision on the part of the government increased the confusion. In 1846, certain ryots of a village in the taluk of Todikombu, who had proposed and cultivated land left waste by Brahmin mirasidars by spending as much as Rs. 295, were disappointed when the land was given back to the latter after three years.¹¹⁸ By and large, the mirasi claim over such land remained unchallenged in Madurai.

Another aspect of the mirasi claim of landownership over which conflicts developed in certain parts of Tamilnadu was the question

113 Board's Cons 19 April 1855, BN 45, para 7, BOR Vol 2468, in pp. 6077-83.

114 *Ibid*

115 Board's Cons 10 Sep. 1840, BN 53, para 2, BOR Vol. 2468, in pp. 8077-83.

116 "If the cultivating ryot fails in cultivating his land and paying the *tirwa* thereon, he is liable to lose his right of occupancy if others are to be found ready to take the ground on the usual terms. Of course, failure of rain and other causes of non-cultivation are taken into consideration and the last occupant is allowed the benefit of them". *Ibid*.

117 See *Madura Collectorate Records* (letters received, 1845), General No. 30072, Serial No. 8942 (in Tamilnadu Archives, Madras), p. 51. The sub-Collector called it "the system of trickery" in *Ibid.*, p. 83.

118 *Madura Collectorate Records* (letters received, 1846), General No. 30074, Serial No. 8944 (in TNA, Madras), pp. 425-26

and mode of payment of *swamibhogam*. *Swamibhogam* was virtually the symbol of superior ownership right, and it was crucial for the mirasidars to enforce its payments.

In Chingleput, the *swamibhogam* claim of the mirasidars was no doubt challenged by the occupants at various points of time. As early as 1824, the mirasidars of the Chingleput taluk petitioned to the government asking, among others, for an official arrangement by which the "strangers" (*payakaris*), even after getting pattas, should give "the privilege of *tunduvaram*" to them.¹¹⁹ Such a petition, by implication, indicates that the exercise of the claim was not universal. A clear defiance, however, came in 1843-44, when the *payakaris* of Pettrapermettore (of the taluk Peddapaliyam), who stated that they used to pay 3.3 per cent of gross produce as *swamibhogam* to the mirasidars (the Collector, however, commented that the said *swamibhogam* included fees like *cuppaiam* payable to the mirasidars from the gross produce, and not from the petitioners' share of produce, and that the mirasidars were "entitled to these fees whether they cultivate their lands personally or by tenants, and *payakaris* who hold land under a mirasidar either receiving *kudivaram* in kind or cultivating for a money rent are required by the custom of the district to pay a separate *swamibhogam*"), refused to pay a new imposition of one rupee per *cawni* by the new mirasidar (a Chetty by caste) in spite of an agreement beforehand.¹²⁰ The result was that the *payakaris* were evicted, and the Collector supported the eviction on the ground that these were not *ulkudi* tenants.¹²¹ The Board of Revenue, however, did not support the action on the ground that the Collector could not judge in his capacity as a revenue officer a case that was between the proprietor and the subtenants¹²². However, the peti-

119 Board's Cons 21 Oct. 1824, BN 19, para 3, BOR Vol. 999, in pp. 9187-91.

120 Board's Cons 23 Feb. 1846, BN 15, BOR Vol. 2013, particularly paras 2 and 7, in pp. 2828-36. The petitioners stated that the rate of *swamibhogam* was at the rate of 4 *markcls* in every *kalam*, which was equal to 3.3 per cent of the gross produce.

121 *Ibid.*, para 9.

122 The Board of Revenue did not support the action, for "the petitioners had a claim to the protection of the Collector as magistrate and that without reference to the points at issue... they should have been maintained in their actual holdings...". *Ibid.*, p. 2838. In another proceeding later on, the Board commented (Bd's Cons 21 May 1846, BN 33-34, para 2, BOR Vol. 2024, in

[footnote continued on p. 80]

ners had already been ejected by the mirasidars and their lands were made over to other parties and "the Board in the present position of the question do not see what course is open to them for the recovery of the land except that of a suit in the civil court".¹²³

Yet there is reason to believe that the exemption from the payment of mirasi fees was common. This is evident from a number of cases and petitions. Reporting on a petition by a person in village Todur, taluk Peddapalaiyam, who claimed the mirasi right on the ground of his exemption from the payment of *swatantrums*, the Collector explained that such exemption was even enjoyed by a considerable number of ordinary *payakaris* "owing to the neglect on the part of the mirasidars to make the demand in the first instance, or reluctance to have recourse to a civil action."¹²⁴ The Collector rejected the claim of the petitioner, stating that the latter had acquired only a particular status called *kudi thenum*, an intermediate position between the mirasidar and the *payakari*, "which though it did not confer on the holding of such pattas, mirasi right and privileges appertaining there, exempted them from the payment of similar privileges to the mirasidars..."¹²⁵ In another report of the Collector on the petition by Mooneppa Modelly and others for recognition as mirasidars in the *agraharam* of Puluvar, taluk Periyapalaiyam, exemption from all payment of mirasi fees was admitted; and though the Collector refused to accept the mirasi claim of the petitioners, the Board of Revenue recognised it on the ground of "their long independent possession" confirmed "by the several decrees of the civil tribunals in suit instituted by their opponents for the recovery of mirasi fees".¹²⁶

[footnote continued from p. 79]

pp 6864-70) : "...when disputes may arise in regard to the mirasidar's dues, he [the Collector] should confine himself to maintain the former village usage and should authorise the sale of the distrained property or ejectment in those instances only in which the *payakaris* refuse to pay *mamul swamibhogam*... which it is understood are usually well defined and to be known from the village account"

123 Bd's Cons 23 Feb. 1846, BN 15-16, BOR Vol 2013, para 2, p. 2838.

124 The revenue authorities were unable to enforce payment on such instances. "*Payakaris* frequently evade a settlement of the demand and when exemption had continued for any length of time the civil courts even decline interfering in the matter". See Bd's Cons 31 March 1853, BN 5, BOR Vol. 12366, in pp. 3793-3803

125 *Ibid*, para 9.

126 Board's Cons 2 April 1855, BN 15-16, paras 3-4, BOR Vol. 2468, pp. 6254-55. See also Minutes of Consultation under date the 1st May 1855 on the subject in Board's Cons 10 May 1855, BN 16, BOR Vol. 2472, pp. 7462-69.

The mirasi claim on *swamibhogam* was also challenged in Tinneveli, though with less force and probably with less frequency.¹²⁷ It is interesting, however, that such a challenge was made in areas where the mirasi right was the strongest, i.e. in the secure wet areas of Vidugramam. This was because of the high or enhanced rate of the *swamibhogam* demand in the taluk. It was complained that with a forced *muchlika* (agreement) signed in 1847-48, the original *swamibhogam* of some villages in the taluk, which ranged between 14.28 to 25 per cent of the government demand according to classes of land, was raised to 25 to 87.5 per cent respectively.¹²⁸ In 1851-52, the *parakudis* of the villages refused to pay the enhanced *swamibhogam* they had been paying since 1847-48.¹²⁹ Both the Collector and the Board of Revenue were of the view that the mirasidars had no right to enhance the *swamibhogam* payable by the *parakudis* of long standing. "In regard to his individual holding, a mirasidar like any other ryot may make his own terms with tenants but in regard to other lands long enjoyed by *payakaris* on a fixed payment, he must be content with the customary share assigned to his class".¹³⁰

3. The nature of landownership - a summary

Our discussion of the various types of landowners along with their prescriptive and actual rights and liabilities shows a few features of landownership of Tamilnad of the time. First of all, while the revised ryotwari system did envisage in principle landownership by the ryots or cultivators of the soil to the extent that it did not conflict with the established mirasi right, the erstwhile intermediaries could well continue their function as "ryot", that is to say, as pattadars or virtual landowners everywhere, and tried to keep their privileges

127 The mirasi right was confined to a more limited area in Tinneveli than in Chingleput, since a large number of villages in the former were regarded as *porumbut/bamirasi* by the government, both of which indicated the absence of the accepted mirasi right. See the government explanation in connection with a plaint on the mirasi right on Bomeapuram, a village in the Striviguntum taluk in Board's Cons 29 August 1836, BN 55, BOR Vol 1518, in pp. 11793-11807. It was, however, admitted that "the inhabitants have surreptitiously converted many *bamirasi* villages into mirasi do [i.e. villages] and much of the *deshacavil* land, which the government assumed from the poligars who were enjoying them in the cirkar villages, has likewise been clandestinely converted into mirasi land . ". *Ibid*, para 11.

128 Board's Cons 31 May 1856, BN 1253, BOR Vol. 2530, in pp. 8908-912.

129 Bd's Cons 11 July 1856, BN 503, BOR Vol 2537, in pp 12640-42

130 *Ibid*, BN 503-4, in pp. 12643-45

intact. In non-mirasi areas, however, landownership was open, because cultivable (though mostly dry) land was abundant and because ownership was not confined here to any "group of privilege".¹³¹ The result was that for a vast part of Tamilnadu, land was owned by the actual cultivators of the soil, though very many of them were only very small cultivators and indeed partly labourers. In mirasi areas, contrary to a view that land was monopolised by a privileged few even within the cover of a ryotwari system, the nature of landownership in practice was markedly different from the claims made by the mirasidars in several parts of these areas. Practices, particularly in Chingleput and South Arcot, were markedly inconsistent with such claims. By contrast, ownership rights were virtually maintained and monopolised by the mirasidars in Tanjore and parts of Trichinopoly and Tinneveli. The pattern of ownership was not thus homogeneous. Though the statistical data do not permit an estimate of the size of each of these groups, there is no doubt that they included marginal cultivators, unprivileged but substantial landlords as well as fully privileged mirasidars, and the distinction of mirasi and non-mirasi areas was not always a clear one.

131 The term "groups of privilege" (distinguishing mirasi privilege from other privileges of landholding) has been coined by Professor Burton Stein in his essay, ' "Privileged landholding": The Concept Stretched to Cover the Case,' in Frykenberg (ed.), *Land tenure and Peasant in South Asia* (Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1978), pp. 67-77.

A STUDY ON SOME ASPECTS OF THE EFFECTS OF
TRANSFERS OF LAND ON AGRICULTURE IN THE
PUNJAB DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY

HIMADRI BANERJEE

I. *Land transfer : an old question reopened.*

During British rule transfers of lands by way of sale and mortgage from *zamindars* to money-lenders constituted a significant development in the agrarian society of India. This problem has attracted frequent attention from scholars. According to many of them this process of loss of land by *zamindars* is significant not merely as a social phenomenon, in the sense that it gradually degraded these *zamindars* to the status of landless labourers, but also as a factor in the 'depression' of agriculture. Transfers of lands, it is argued, gave rise to a new group of land owners who were practically parasitic elements merely living on rents from their purchased holdings.

But recent researches on this problem in some parts of India have raised doubts about the largescale dispossession of the *zamindars* by money-lenders and traders. 'Most of the evidence that is cited about land transfers', it is argued, 'comes from periods of famine and may therefore not be representative.'¹ Even when such dispossessions actually took place, according to this view, these transfers amounted merely to transfers of legal titles to the land that were affected, without necessarily involving the replacement of *zamindars* by the rural creditors or by other groups purchasing such lands. Such land transfers, it is also argued, scarcely affected the basic organisation of the small peasant economy.

In view of these conflicting opinions among scholars about land transfers it would be worthwhile to reopen the whole question on.

1 M. D. Morris, 'Economic Change and Agriculture in Nineteenth Century India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, June 1966, p. 191.

land transfers. The Punjab under British rule may be taken up as a test case. In this province the British Government got a unique opportunity of introducing various administrative experiments which were hardly possible in many of the old regulated provinces like Bengal. The Punjab was regarded as a model of British rule and here the activities of the young British officials were marked by a spirit of 'paternal rule'. They were expected to preserve the hereditary village communities 'in all their integrity'. Consequently, the largescale eviction of the members of the village proprietary body by the money-lenders and traders and the consequent emergence of a market in land naturally becomes an interesting subject of discussion.

II *Transfers of lands under Sikh rule : their effects on the agrarian society of the Punjab.*

Transfers of lands were by no means a new development in the rural society of the Punjab during the period under review. The available official reports sufficiently support the view that even under Sikh rule, transfers of lands occurred, at least in some parts of the province. Thus from Bannu it was reported that 'fully two-thirds of this prolific valley ... passed away from sheer poverty out of the hands of the *zumindars* [*zamindars*] into the possession of mortgagees, chiefly *Syuds* [*Sayads*] and other wealthy men', who 'had plenty of funds to invest in the misfortunes of others.'² In Marwat also mortgage of land was not entirely unknown. Similarly in some of the south-western districts like Montgomery and Multan many Aroras coming from central Punjab districts were granted lands under *Diwani Sawan Mall*.³

But transfers of lands were generally of a very restricted nature under Sikh rule and there were three reasons for this. They were : (1) laws of pre-emption which greatly discouraged any 'outsiders' (not members of the village proprietary body) to secure village lands; (2) insecurity of harvests and frequent famines depressed the value of lands; (3) increasing lawlessness prevailing in some parts of the province during the closing years of Sikh rule also operated as a great deterrent to the movement of population in search of new lands.

2 *Punjab Government Records : Lahore Political Diaries, 1847-1849, Vol-V, Political Diaries of Lieutenant H. B. Edwardes, Assistant to the Resident at Lahore* (Allahabad 1911), 22 January 1848, p. 224

3 *An Economic Survey of Durrana Langana, a village in the Multan District, Punjab Village Surveys-II* (Lahore 1938). p. 109.

The restricted nature of land transfers accounts for the paucity of relevant data, and it is difficult to form a clear idea of its effects on the rural society where such transfers occurred. Evidence coming from Bannu or Montgomery, however, seems to lend support to the view that its effects were not always of an unmixed evil. In Bannu, for example, where ownership of land passed to non-cultivating Sayads, the effects of such transfers on the economy were not likely to have been wholesome, since the Sayads mostly lived off their rental income, caring little to spend any part of it on the improvement of land.⁴

Contrary to these practices among the Sayads of Bannu, the Aroras of Multan and Montgomery set an example of enterprising landlords. The mostly came from the central Punjab districts and permanently settled there. They invested their capital in constructing or repairing wells. They approached lands 'as capitalists determined to get the most out of their investments' and 'made considerable extension of cultivation possible by means of agricultural improvements as well.'

It is, therefore, evident that the Sayads of Bannu and the Aroras of Montgomery presented two different aspects of the nature and effects of land transfers during Sikh rule. The former practically turned out to be a parasitic group and merely reaping profits from cultivation in idleness while the latter, shortly after their settlement, set up an example of enterprising group of landlords in the midst of wilderness by investing their labour and capital in the cultivation of their newly acquired holdings.

III. *Extent of land transfers during the second half of the 19th century.*

In the second half of the 19th century transfers of land almost tended to be a general phenomenon. Official statistics on alienations, mostly collected through village *patwaris* or other revenue officials at the lowest level, clearly indicate that such transfers were particularly on the increase towards the close of the century, when frequent famines repeatedly ravaged the province. In normal seasons also,

4 *Punjab Government Records : Lahore Political Diaries, 1847-1849, Vol-V Political Diaries of Lieutenant H. B. Edwardes, Assistant to the Resident at Lahore* (Allahabad 1911), 22 January 1848, p. 224

transfers of lands more or less continued unabated though their numbers as well as the area affected by them might have been lesser in extent.

Systematic official statistics on land transfers during the early years of British rule were not available for the whole province. Indebtedness and alienation were then certainly prevalent in various parts of the Punjab; but most of the settlement officers were under the impression that alienations of land in the 1850s were of a limited nature and therefore these did not attract much attention. Consequently, only some fragmentary evidence for certain districts was available. In the Alipur *tahsil* of the Muzaffargarh district, it was found that small area had been alienated, nearly three-quarters of which went to Hindu traders (1850-54). Similarly in 1854 in two *tahsils* of the Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts, three and six percent of the available land respectively had been mortgaged; in several other *tahsils* of these districts less than one percent was under mortgage. But from the mid-1860s when alienations of land gradually affected almost all the districts of the province, we have a systematic statistical account throwing lights on the various aspects of this problem.

According to the available sale statistics, the average annual sale of lands increased by nearly 40 percent between the years from 1865 to 1884. In this increase sale of land of this period, two districts of the Derajat division, namely Dera Ghazi Khan and Dera Ismail Khan were particularly affected.⁶ Even afterwards this upward trend continued and in 1899-1900 it was estimated that transfers of land by sale increased by nearly 431 percent since 1865. Correspondingly, the number of sales rose sharply by 211 percent during the last quarter of the 19th century.⁷

The same period also witnessed a steady increase in the mortgaged area of the province. According to the statistics furnished by the annual revenue reports between 1875-76 and 1899-1900 the mortgaged area increased to slightly over 200 percent. The following districts chiefly suffered at the beginning of the present century (1900-01).

5 F. C. Fanshawe, Officiating Junior Secretary's No. 231, 7 November 1888, Proceedings of Revenue and Agriculture Department (Hereinafter Rev and Agr), Revenue Branch (Hereinafter R) May 1891, 1-8A.

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*; *Annual Land Revenue Administration of the Punjab 1899-1900* (Hereinafter R.R.), Statement No. XA.

Table 1

Total cultivated area under mortgage in seven important districts of the province.

Name of the districts greatly affected by mortgage of lands.	Percentage of total cultivated area under mortgage.
Gurdaspur	25.5
Sialkot	25.1
Kohat	20.4
Bannu	19.9
Dera Ghazi Khan	18.7
Multan	17.7
Amritsar	17.0

Source : *Land Revenue Administration Report 1900-1901*, p. 13.

IV. *A few significant factors leading to the development of land market in the Punjab.*

Such largescale alienations of lands by way of sale or mortgage were generally an outcome of two sets of circumstances. *Zamindars* had to sell or were prepared to sell under certain conditions more lands than before, and the purchasers of such lands (who were often *zamindars'* creditors) considered it more worthwhile than before to purchase such lands.

The compulsion under which *zamindars* sold their holdings was caused by the permanent background of their indebtedness. A number of factors also went to increase their volume of indebtedness. One such factor was the increase of cultivation over inferior soils in some of the densely populated districts of the province, which population increase in the context of a more or less unchanged technology necessitated, thus making the new cultivation more vulnerable to natural hazards. Secondly, rising prices of different articles of day-to-day use often prevented small holders of land from repaying their debts; their difficulty was again aggravated with their small food-stocks running out three or four months after the harvest, thus necessitating purchase of food at a dear market. In some cases their indebtedness tended to be perpetuated by the vicious system of money-

lending operation in the province. Against this background of general indebtedness *zamindars* were often compelled to sell their holdings to wipe off part of their debts.

A number of developments also led the purchasers of *zamindars'* holdings to regard such purchases as a secure and worthwhile transfer of their capital. Already the completion of different regular settlements of land revenue had clearly defined *zamindars'* legal status in their holdings. This legal status coupled with the right to alienate through law courts, enabled creditors to acquire lands of their indebted clients against the security of their credit. Further, various other factors contributed to the increasing demand for land. In this connection the rise of population and its effects on land deserves our special attention. With the increase of population there developed a large-scale movement of population in search of lands for bringing them under cultivation. In many of the densely populated central and submontane districts, in the context of a limited scope for new cultivation and of the lack of alternative opportunities for the use of *zamindars'* labour and capital, there developed an increasing demand for land. In some other parts of the province this demand tended to increase with the opening out of canal irrigation over waste lands. It increased not only the per acreage outturn, but also brought about an increased degree of security against famines and crop failures. All these factors led to a steady rise in the prices of land.⁸ These increased price of land made it an object of safe security and purchasers of such lands seldom ran any risk of losing their money, and could easily resell them, if they so intended, often with a clear margin of profit. Such cases of resells had often been reported by many district officers of this period. Finally, land purchase was certainly beneficial to purchasers, particularly when they were mere *sahukars*. The reasons for this eagerness of the *sahukars* to purchase land were two fold:

8	Year	Average sale price of cultivated land in rupees per acre
	1870-71	15
	1875-76	20
	1880-81	18.5
	1885-86	36
	1890-91	61
	1895-96	59
	1900-01	77

Source : R.R. for the respective years.

they sought landed property for the sake of acquiring the respectable status of a landowner; further, 'it is so good an investment.'⁹

V. *Who purchased the alienated holdings?*

In connection with this largescale transfers of land, one interesting question crops up: who were the purchasers of these lands? The local officers of the government usually classified them into three broad groups: (1) old agriculturists, i.e., persons recognised as proprietors of land at the first regular settlement in a particular district, (2) non-agriculturists, i.e., persons who were not agriculturists by profession but engaged in trade, money-lending or other avocations, often belonging to the *sahukar* community, and (3) new-agriculturists, i.e., persons who were not regarded as proprietors at the first regular settlement, but subsequently acquired lands by purchase and became agriculturists by profession; they often came from the different artisan communities such as *tarkhans* (carpenters) and *lohars* (blacksmiths). The government for the first time introduced these classifications in 1876 which had obvious limitations. While admitting many of them, Grant, settlement officer of the Amritsar district pointed out that it was extremely difficult to discriminate between land sold or mortgaged to money-lenders and that alienated to agriculturists. Now as the term 'old agriculturist' is held to include any man who already owns and cultivates land in any village whatever, it is inevitable that many persons are returned under this head whose real occupation is money-lending and money-lending only.¹⁰ In many cases with a view to avoiding income tax assessment money-lenders often described themselves as agriculturists.¹¹ Similarly, in many of the official statistics¹² new-agriculturists were treated as money-lenders.

The official classification is not entirely acceptable. But from a critical perusal of other official sources some broad indications about the purchasers of land can be made. In the districts of Ludhiana, Ferozepore and Hoshiarpur many *zamindars* were found

9 L. J. H. Grey, Commissioner and Superintendent of Lahore Division's No 510.210 July 1889, Rev and Agr(R) December 1891, 10-11A

10 J. A. Grant, Settlement Collector Amritsar's No. 553, 15 February 1889, Rev and Agr(R) December 1891, 10-11A.

11 T. J. Kennedy, Officiating Deputy Commissioner (Hereinafter D.C.) Montgomery's No.—, 31 December 1889, Rev and Agr(R) December 1891, 10-11A.

12 A. Andersen, D. C. Hissar's No 64G, 11 March 1889, Rev and Agr(R) December 1891, 10-11A

actively engaged in extending credit to their kinsmen. In these districts also quite a substantial portion of land was alienated to them. In Hoshiarpur, the settlement officer noted in the early 1880s that 'nearly one-third of the land sold and mortgaged' was taken by 'resident agriculturists', while some of the remaining two-thirds were also in the hands of men who were 'outsiders certainly', but belonging to the 'agricultural classes', and are not 'mere money-lenders'.¹³ In the upland tracts of the Ferozepore district also the Sikh Jat *zamundars* were the 'great majority of the mortgagees'¹⁴ while in Jullundur it was estimated that nearly half of the alienated area of the district went to *zamindars*.¹⁵ In Ludhiana *zamindars* were no less successful in acquiring the transferred land from their fellow brethren. In the Samrala Dhaia as well as in the Ludhiana Bet II circles, nearly half of the mortgaged area went to them.¹⁶ In Amritsar also 'only a small portion' of the cultivated land passed into the hands of the professional money-lenders.¹⁷

While *zamindars* were thus making a considerable acquisition in a number of central and submontane districts, *sahukars* achieved equal, if not greater, success in some other districts of the province. In Ambala and Gurdaspur they acquired by far the largest alienated lands from their indebted clients. Their predominant position in the Ambala district drew the attention of the settlement officer in the early 1890s. In the Jagadhri *tahsil* (Ambala) it was estimated that 'nearly one-fourth of the mortgaged area was transferred 'in favour of the bankers of the town of Jagadhri'.¹⁸ Similarly in the Batala *tahsil* (Gurdaspur) villagers were deeply indebted to the money-lenders of the town and the latter as mortgagees made an enormous amount of profit out of their credit transactions.¹⁹ In Sialkot also more than half of the alienated area had been acquired by them even before the close of the century²⁰ and Thorburn's inquiry of the late 1890s in the three villages of this district bears ample

13 Lieutenant Governor, Punjab's No. 81, 28 March 1890, *Hoshiarpur Settlement Report 1890*, para 5, pp. 4-5.

14 E. B. Francis, Settlement Officer Ferozepore's No 419, 31 December 1888, *Rev and Agr(R)* December 1891, 10-11A.

15 *Jullundur Settlement Report 1892*, para 32, p. 71.

16 *Ludhiana District Gazetteer, 1888-9*, pp. 191 and 195.

17 *Amritsar Settlement Report 1894*, para 4, p. 3.

18 *Karnal-Amballa Settlement Report 1891*, paras 29-30, pp. 18-19.

19 L. W. Dane, Settlement Collector Gurdaspur's No 4, 4 January 1889, *Rev and Agr(R)* December 1891, 10-11A.

20 *Sialkot Settlement Report 1895*, para 11, p. 9.

testimony to this fact.²¹ In the Rewari *tahsil* of Gurgaon district the 'Bunniahs and Dhunsars, members of the non-cultivating money-lending classes' acquired by far the largest area alienated by the Meo, Ahir and Jat proprietors.²²

In western and south-western districts also professional money-lenders acquired quite a significant portion of the cultivable lands by way of sale and mortgage. In Jhelum, for example, where 'the distinction between the Muhammadan land-owning classes and the Hindu money-lender and trader' was strongly marked, the latter grabbed a little over the half of the alienated area of the district. In Multan about 28 percent had been transferred to them²³ while in Montgomery the proportion of alienation made to 'bonafide agriculturists' being very small, money-lenders and shop-keepers were naturally the chief purchasers of land.²⁴ Even in acquiring the best lands of this district in the form of mortgage along the Ravi, the money-lenders were more active than other groups. Beyond the Indus, in the Derajat the money-lenders' dominant position in the rural economy had been a recognised fact even under Sikh rule. In Dera Ismail Khan the Kulachis Aroras alone acquired 85,644 acres of the alienated lands²⁵ though in Dera Ghazi Khan much of their acquisition had been wrongly returned in favour of the *zamindars*. In the Marwat *tahsil* (Bannu district) the strong tribal system rendered sales to them very difficult, but mortgages were very common, and

21	
Village	Cultivated area alienated to money-lender's in percent
Karawal	42
Sihok	42
Kot Ghumman	56

Source : *Report on Agricultural Indebtedness and Transfers of Land*, Appendix IV, pp. 265, 278 and 293, Rev and Agr (Land Revenue Branch, Hereinafter LR) November 1898, 3-22A.

22 *Gurgaon Assessment Report 1883*, para 10.

23 Major J. B. Hutchinson, D. C. Multan's No. 645, 31 December 1888, Rev and Agr(R) December 1891, 10-11A.

24 T. J. Kennedy, Officiating D. C. Montgomery's No.—, 31 December 1888, Rev and Agr(R) December 1891, 10-11A.

25 Note by Captain J. G. Crosthwaite, Settlement Officer Dera Ismail Khan's No.—, n.d., Rev and Agr(LR) May 1901, 10-11A.

in the riverain *tahsils* (Isa Khal and Mianwali) a similar state of things prevailed towards the close of the century.²⁶

VI. *Effects of transfers of lands on agriculture :*

What resulted from such transfers of lands to money-lenders or *zamindars*? An obvious consequence would be a largescale displacement of traditional *zamindars* (who or whose ancestors held lands even before Sikh rule) from their ancestral holdings. Even where the old *zamindars* continued to cultivate their transferred holdings, the conditions under which they had to work were substantially altered as a consequence of these transfers. They were reduced to the position of mere cultivators, stripped of all the necessary status and privilege usually enjoyed by a *zamindar*.

Thorburn's inquiry in three districts of the province (Sialkot, Gujranwala and Shahpur) throws important light on the altered position of the *zamindars* as a result of land transfers. In Sialkot and Gujranwala it was found that *zamindars* were often disallowed to cultivate their alienated lands. They were frequently replaced by the 'outsiders' who, cultivated for the *sahukars*. But in Shahpur the case was different. There the mortgagee rarely ventures to evict him, however troublesome he may be as a tenant²⁷ This difference in the treatment of mortgagors in the two places was largely due to the fact that in Sialkot there was often a competition among cultivators for lands. This competition made things easier²⁸ for the new purchasers to replace the old proprietors by outsiders if and when they showed their unwillingness to cultivate lands on terms and conditions imposed by the former. But the situation was somewhat different in Shahpur. Here no such competition for lands existed; further the ties here among the members of the village proprietary body were still strong enough to resist the total eviction of *zamindars* from their alienated holdings.²⁹

26 Report of M. L. Dames, D. C. Dera Ghazi Khan's No—, n.d., Rev and Agr(R) December 1891, 10-11A.

27 *Report on Agricultural Indebtedness and Transfers of Lands*, General Report, para 51, Rev and Agr (LR) November 1898, 3-22A.

28 "... mortgagors who cultivate for mortgagees are often ejected, it is easy to get new tenant here ..." *Ibid.*, Appendix II, p. 206.

29 *Ibid.*, General Report, para 51.

Similar cases of resistance offered by the village proprietors against the new purchasers of land occurred in Hissar in eastern Punjab.³⁰

Usually, however, the *sahukars* as mortgagees, allowed *zamindar*-mortgagors to cultivate their alienated holdings. Being busy in their trade and money-lending the *sahukars* found it convenient to leave the cultivation of the transferred lands in the hands of *zamindar*-mortgagors, because the latter often agreed to the most onerous terms for this cultivation. In explaining the situation, O'Brien, settlement officer of the Muzaffargarh district, pointed out:

I have known cases where the mortgagor agreed to pay the land revenue, to supply the labour for canal clearance, and to pay the mortgagee one-fourth of the whole crop, or what is harder still, a good round sum in cash or grain, whether crops were produced or not. Thus a purchaser of land gets land only, while mortgagee gets land and a hardworking slave into the bargain.³¹

This process of leaving cultivation to the *zamindar*-mortgagors often gave rise to a peculiar form of tenure, popularly known as *lekha-mukhi*. *Lekha-mukhi* was a form of running mortgage in which the *zamindar*-mortgagor was allowed to cultivate his transferred lands by his creditor (usually *sahukar*) under certain specific conditions. Under this system the former surrendered his crop to the latter, who paid all expenses of cultivation for him, deducted interest due to himself, and finally, was supposed to credit the balance, if any, towards the liquidation of the debt, a consummation seldom, if ever, attained. In this form of cultivation the *zamindar*-mortgagor was 'fleeced in every possible way'. The debt tended to grow till at last the creditor eventually appropriated the proprietary right of that land.³² Thorburn, Commissioner of the Rawalpindi division, found that this *lekha-mukhi* mortgage was fast spreading throughout the Punjab towards the close of the last century.³³

³⁰ Remarks by Colonel C. A. McMahon, Commissioner and Superintendent, Hissar Division, *Extract from the Revenue (Land Revenue) reports of local officers, bound with the Annual Land Revenue Administration of the Punjab* (Hereinafter *E.R.R.*) 1876-77, p. 6.

³¹ Remarks by O'Brien, D. C. Muzaffargarh, *R. R.* 1881-82, para 23, p. 15

³² *Jhang Settlement Report* 1882, para 89, p. 72

³³ S. S. Thorburn, *Muslims and Money-lenders in the Punjab* (Edinburgh 1886), p. 83

In many parts of the province, the *sahukars* as mortgagees did not hesitate to claim a higher rate of rent from their *zamindar*-mortgagors. In his evidence before the the Thorburn Commission, Kartar Baksh, the *patwari* of the Kot Ghumman village (Sialkot) also frankly admitted that *sahukars* took four maunds of wheat per acre as rent in *rabi* when a *zamindar* would only take three.³⁴ This higher rate of rent often created bitter relations between the *zamindar*-mortgagor and the *sahukar*-mortgagee, but the former knew that his opposition or his refusal to pay the high rate of rent would only bring about his eventual eviction from lands. So 'to avoid expatriation, the old owner will pay a higher rent than a new tenant, who will only pay a customary rent prevailing in the neighbourhood.'³⁵

This process of transfers of lands to *sahukars* and their attempt to exact a higher rate of rent from the *zamindar*-mortgagors deeply affected the rural economy of the province. The *sahukars'* extreme greed, their absenteeism along with their readiness to arrange the cultivation of their acquired holdings on a crop-sharing basis, inevitably created an increasingly parasitic group in the agrarian society. The *sahukars* also increased the old customary rents, took a share of the straw, attached the plough cattle and sold the houses of their debtors³⁶ In many cases they even reduced the *zamindars* to a status of *sam*.

Literally *sam* means one-fourth of produce earned by a plough. When a *zamindar* has transferred all his land, and has no assets left except himself and a pair of bullocks, he borrows money on the security of his *sam*, undertaking to pay his *sahukar* each harvest one fourth of his produce in payment of interest, no matter where earned : a debtor without bullocks may give his labour, such as ploughing, building of a wall, etc., as interest on his debt ; sometimes a debtor makes over his son or brother to his creditor as a servant in lieu of interest. A *sahukar* sometimes lends out services of his debtor to friends or relatives.³⁷

34 Report on Agricultural Indebtedness and Transfers of Land, Appendix II, p. 206 Rev & Agr (LR) November 1898, 3-22A.

35 L. W. Dane, Settlement Collector Gurdaspur's No. 4. 4 January 1889, Rev and Agr(R) December 1891, 10-11A

36 Attock District Gazetteer, 1907, p. 96.

37 Report on Agricultural Indebtedness and Transfers of Land, Appendix II, p. 229. Rev and Agr(LR) November 1898, 3-22A.

It is interesting to note that towards the close of the last century the *sam* was fast becoming a common phenomenon in many parts of the province. It was then also estimated that in one Khabaki village in the Shahpur district nearly 60 to 80 men served their creditors as *sams*.³⁸

Though land transfers did in many cases produce adverse effects, we should also take into considerations some other aspects of the same problem. Land alienations were not always, as we shall presently see, necessarily injurious to rural economy. Their effects on agricultural production and economic development largely depended on the characters of the persons who bought and sold the land. Where the land was transferred from a *zamindar* who did not use, or was unable to use it effectively to one who did, the effects on production were likely to be healthy. To have a better understanding of this problem four major districts from different regions may be taken up for our present considerations.

Gurgaon (Eastern Punjab) :

Towards the close of the last century Gurgaon was regarded as 'one of the most embarrassed districts of the province.'³⁹ Here lands were mostly passing out of the hands of the Meo proprietors, commonly known for their slovenly cultivation. In many parts of this district, particularly in its Rewari *tahsil*, a large area of land was transferred to Bania and Dhunsars. It was a common practice among them to sublet these lands to the peasant-mortgagors at a rack rent or rejecting them and, putting in strangers as their tenants.⁴⁰ But there remained still more areas transferred by poorer *zamindars* to their wealthier members of the same brotherhood who commanded 'at the time most means of cultivation at their disposal.'⁴¹

At the time of the revision of assessment (1883) it was estimated that out of 12 percent of the mortgaged area of the district, 4 percent went to members of the same proprietary body while the remaining 8 percent was occupied by the 'outsiders'. A considerable area was held on mortgage by 'comparatively prosperous cultivators belonging to other villages'. Besides them, a sizable tract was also held by

38 *Ibid.*, p. 235.

39 Memorandum by J. B. Macdonachie, D.C. Gurdaspur, *Ibid.*.

40 *Gurgaon Assessment Report 1883*, para 11.

41 *Ibid.*

thrifty village artisans on mortgage. Wilson, settlement officer, thus wrote :

Again a very large area in some villages is held on mortgage in small plots by agriculturists resident in the village, but not members of the proprietary body, such as chammars, kumhars, and even chuhars, men who have been able to advance a little money to some needy proprietors and have taken in exchange the right to cultivate a plot of his land untill the loan is repaid. This is almost equivalent to the purchase of a right of occupancy in the field, and as in such cases also the transfer brings the land into the hands of a thrifty peasant who actually cultivates himself, it is not be regretted...⁴²

This process of alienation of lands to enterprising cultivators continued even afterwards and in 1909 it was estimated that more than half the transfers were to members of agricultural tribes who were again in most cases co-shares of the village proprietary lands.⁴³

Ferozepore (Central Punjab) .

In Ferozepore transfers of lands by the Dogars and Gujar *zamindars* had been drawing attention of the different settlement officers over many years. But here such alienations, as we shall presently see, were not always an unmixed evil. These two proprietary communities, however, were not always regarded as good agriculturists; the Dogras in particular had been described by one settlement officer as the 'most lawless and discontented tribe in the district' and were of 'lowest class of husbandmen.'⁴⁴ In the Ferozepore Bet much of their transferred lands no doubt went to money-lenders and bankers; but outside the Bet, the great majority of the mortgages in the upland tracts were in favour of 'more prudent and industrious' agriculturists of this district.⁴⁵ They were mostly Jat *zamindars*, commonly regarded as the 'most thriving agricultural community in the whole Punjab.'⁴⁶ Here in Ferozepore, they practically dominated the trade in agricultural

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Gurgaon Settlement Report 1909*, para 18, p. 14.

⁴⁴ T. G. Walker, Assistant Commissioner Karnal's No. 53, 14 April 1884, Rev and Agr(R) August 1884, 10-12A.

⁴⁵ E. B. Francis, Settlement Officer Ferozepore's No 419, 31 December 1888, Rev and Agr(R) December 1891, 10-11A.

produce, controlled the money-lending transactions in the Moga *tahsils* and occupied a good deal of land alienated by the Muhammedan proprietary tribes. Many of their kinsmen were in the army and sent money to be invested in land. In Moga at least they were independent of money-lenders and their village sites were made up of most commodious and alienated houses.⁴⁷ Consequently when they took up the alienated lands of the Gujars and Dogars for their own cultivation, they found a unique opportunity to demonstrate their worth as agricultural entrepreneurs.

Multan (Western Punjab) :

In Multan Aroras coming from the central Punjab districts were examples of enterprising landlords since Sikh rule. During the period under review they continued to be the main purchasers of lands alienated by the Muhammedan proprietors of this district. According to MacLagan, settlement officer, *sahukars* held under mortgage 39 per cent of the cultivated area of this district at the beginning of the present century.

Much of this area they held under their direct cultivation. They were also improving landlords. They invested 'their profits in the land. Improvements are effected by them which Muhammadans [Zamindars] as a rule would never undertake. The value of land thus raised and crops rendered more secure.'⁴⁸ This process of alienation of lands to the Hindu *sahukars* had wholesome effects on the rural economy of this district. Here, if 'cultivation is anywhere above the average, if fruit trees are growing along the water courses, or if an experiment is being tried, it is ten to one that there is a *kirar* in the background directing and supervising the work.' In many cases lands also passed into the hands of Muslim *zamindars* who were 'equally shrewd, thrifty, affluent, forming a fine stamp of landed gentry.'⁴⁹ They possessed all the shrewdest instincts of the *sahukars* and the necessary attributes of good agriculturists.⁵⁰

46 Remarks by Lieutenant Colonel C F Massy, Commissioner and Superintendent Jullundur Division, *E.R.R.* 1895-96, p. 45.

47 T. G. Walker, Assistant Commissioner Karnal's No. 53, 14 April, 1884, *Rev and Agr(R)* August 1884, 10-12A.

48 Major J. B Hutchinson, D. C. Multan's No. 645, 31 December 1888, *Rev and Agr(R)* December 1891, 10-11A.

49 Remarks by C. G. Parsons, D. C. Multan, *E.R.R.* 1888-89 p. 14.

50 Remarks by J R Maconachie, D. C. Multan, *E.R.R.* 1891-92, p. 30.

Ambala (Submontane Punjab) :

From the standpoint of agricultural indebtedness the four southern *tahsils* of Ambala had often been described as 'the worst affected tract in the eastern portion of the province.'⁵¹ In Jagadhri, money-lenders, who acquired nearly half of the transferred area, were regarded as 'greedy and unimproving landlords.' Similarly in Naraingarh *tahsil* the settlement officer did not notice any improvement in cultivation due to passing out of holdings to them. In this background, the Pipli *tahsil* presented an altogether different picture. Here the inefficient Rajput *zamindars* were gradually disappearing as a result of land transfer; they were slowly replaced by an enterprising group of Mali cultivators. They were of a much more independent character, and more fitted to make a good use of land.⁵²

Prior to the coming of Malis much of the Northern and Southern Chachra circles were a wild tract with a stiff soil and an abundant growth of *dhak* jungle, and intersected by several hill streams. The Southern Chachra circle was an exceedingly unhealthy tract while in the Northern Chachra, the soil, though good, could not be properly cultivated because of the absence of an enterprising agrarian community. Here the proprietary right of the village lands mostly belonged to 'broken-down *zamindars*, or to non-resident proprietors, money-lenders and others'. From them the enterprising Malis purchased a considerable tract of lands and they contributed much to turning this 'neglected' zone into new a centre of a healthy agrarian enterprise.

The immigration of Malis into Pipli from the northern *tahsils* of Ambala, and even from Patiala, is a very hopeful movement. Their first purchase was made in 1869, when they bought about 2,000 acres in Bir Babain from a member of the Kunjpura family. This estate, which was mostly waste when bought, is now the best village in the Northern Chachra. The next purchase was in 1873, and since then scarcely a year has passed in which Malis have not made large investment in land belonging to broken-down *zamindars* or non-resident proprietors, money-lenders and others, who would have extended cultivation. The number of purchases from the latter is very satisfactory. Altogether 8,500 acres have been bought, and

51 *Ambala Settlement Report 1893*, para 4, p. 3.

52 J. A. Grant, Settlement Collector Amritsar's No. 553, 15 February 1889, Rev and Agr(R) December 1891, 10-11A.

the prices entered in the deeds of sale aggregate Rs. 1,18,000. A division on ploughs of the lands purchased is speedily effected, and the waste rapidly disappears. The first purchases were in the Northern, but the movement has now extended to the Southern Chachra, and even to the Indri Nardak, where Malis from Kharar have recently bought a small estate from non-resident landlords. Only last year Malis of the same tahsil and of Naraingarh purchased the whole of Devidaspur from a bania of the Amballa tahsil and of Ratgal from non-resident Shekhs of Kunjpura.⁵³

In these districts transfers of lands from inefficient proprietors (Rajputs and Gujars) to enterprising *zamindars* (Jats, Arains and Kambohs) often resulted in the emergence of stronger and healthier units of cultivation. This process continued even after the passing of the Land Alienation Act (Act XIII of 1900) which also deserves our special attention in this connection.⁵⁴

According to the provisions of the Act a number of agricultural tribes such as the Jats, Gujars, Rajputs, Arains and Pathans, whose avocations were recognised to be distinctly agricultural, were notified as the agricultural tribes. They alone were freely allowed to transfer lands among themselves. But *sahukars* under this Act were declared distinctly non-agricultural groups and hence they were officially debarred from making any new purchase of lands from those agricultural tribes. Therefore, the *sahukars* no longer allowed to acquire lands of the agricultural tribes while thrifty tribes such as the Jats and Kambohs got a unique opportunity to expropriate their weaker brethren.

Under this Act, of all the agricultural tribes, the Jats achieved the most striking success in acquiring the lands of other agricultural tribes. During the first eight years (1901 to 1908) following the enforcement of the Act they added a considerable tract to their ancestral holdings in the districts of Ferozepore, Ludhiana, Lahore and Hissar, often at the cost of the Rajputs, Dogars and Gujars. A similar process was also going on over the years in the Panipat and Bagar tracts of Karnal

53 *Ambala Settlement Report 1893*, para 12, p. 6.

54 For a detailed discussion on the different aspects of this Act, see Norman G. Barrier's *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of 1900* (Durham, N. C. 1966); this Act came into effect by the Notification in the *Gazette of India*, 'Extraordinary', 8 June 1901, Rev and Agr (LR) May 1901, 35B..

as well as in the Jagraon circles of Ludhiana even before the enforcement of this Act. Now the passing of this Act strengthened the position of the Jats.

As early as 1902-03 this acquisitive instinct of the Jats came to be clearly admitted. In Ferozepore they made 'considerable encroachment on other tribes, especially on Rajputs' while in Hoshiarpur, Lahore and Delhi they took more lands on mortgage than they mortgaged. Their successful bid in replacing the *sahukars* in the land market in various districts of the province was also now an established fact. In the next year (1903-04) they continued to gain at the cost of the Rajputs and in Ferozepore their dominant position in the land market persisted. Finally, from 1904-05, by sale and mortgage, they continued to acquire more lands throughout the province.

The Jats were universally regarded as one of the most thriving and industrious peasant proprietors of the central Punjab districts. They were also noted for their thrift and prudence and amassed sufficient capital through various channels, viz., trade and money-lending. Naturally this steady acquisition of lands by the Jats represents a healthy aspect of the rural economy of the province. The significance of these transfers of lands would be better illustrated if we contrast the system of cultivation of the Jats with that of the Rajputs. While commenting on the Jats of one central Punjab district, the district officer wrote long before the passing of the Act :

The Jat of the *Pawadh*, or highly cultivated and irrigated eastern tract, is a slave to his land. With him it has been all work and no play for generations, and this has told on his physique and intellect . . . He has no thoughts beyond his village; and never dreams of service . . . he is thrifty to niggardliness, and industrious beyond comparison.⁵⁵

On the other hand, the Rajputs were generally regarded as 'unimproving landlords' in the central Punjab districts.

Too proud to till the land themselves, they rarely touch a plough or yoke a bullock, but cultivate through the agency of servants, or lease out their land to tenants. In either case they receive only landlord's profits, while the sturdier Jat, cultivating with his own hand, reaps the profits both of landlord and of cultivator.⁵⁶

55 *Ludhiana District Gazetteer 1889-89*, p. 82.

56 *Jullundur District Gazetteer 1883-84*, p. 26.

Besides the Jats, the Kambohs and the Arains were two other enterprising agrarian tribes of the province. Their frugal habits as well as their readiness to undertake all kinds of odd jobs in connection with the cultivation of their lands enabled them to acquire a considerable tract of land during the period under review. In the districts of Lahore⁵⁷ and Jullundur⁵⁸ the Kambohs⁵⁹ were regarded as a first rate cultivating tribes while the Arains were equally reputed for their tobacco and vegetable-cultivation in most of the central Punjab districts.⁶⁰ The mortgage statistics of the first few years⁶¹ following the enforcement of the Land Alienation Act clearly indicated that the Arains were particularly successful in acquiring lands in a number of central and submontane districts. In Amritsar it was also found that many Arains who managed to acquire merely the status of occupancy tenants in Rajput villages were frequently seen growing vegetables and other products requiring constant labour and supervision, which no other tribe would take the trouble to perform.

Transfers of lands also paved the way for the consolidation of the fragmented and scattered holdings of the *zamindars*. This process particularly helped the smaller peasant proprietors to add to their holdings and consequently made for a much better utilization of their resources, at least in the sense that without this arrangement a large part of such resources, would have remained unemployed, and it also made possible, at least in some cases, the emergence of more viable units of cultivation as a result of cluster of splinter holdings. In order to enjoy these benefits an owner often mortgaged the outlying part of the land simply as a matter of convenience⁶² and in return held the land of others 'near his home' on mortgage.⁶³

57 *Lahore District Gazetteer 1893-94*, p. 107.

58 *Jullundur District Gazetteer 1883-84*, p. 26.

59 *Panjab Castes. Being a reprint of the chapter on "The Races, Castes, and Tribes of the People" in the Report on the Census of the Panjab published in 1883 by the late Sir Denzil Ibbetson, K.C.S.I.* (Patiala 1970), pp. 189-195.

60 Sir Malcolm Lyall Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* (London 1928), pp. 47-48.

61 *Annual Report on the Punjab Alienation of Land Act XII of 1900, 1904-05*, paras 46-47; *Ibid.*, 1905-06, paras 43-44; *Ibid.*, 1906-07, para 25.

62 J. A. Grant, Settlement Collector Amritsar's No. 553, 15 February 1889, Rev and Agr(R) December 1891, 10-11A.

63 Remarks by Captain H. P. P. Leigh, D. C. Kohat, *E.R.R. 1888-89*, p. 19.

In some cases the owners transferred part of their lands also with a view to getting necessary credit to undertake newer healthy ventures. A Moga Jat frequently mortgaged part of his holding to a fellow *zamundar* whenever he wanted money for a trading venture; and on his return either redeemed the mortgage or altered it in some way to suit his convenience.⁶⁴ It was also a common practice among the *zamundars* to mortgage their lands to a relative and spend the credit toward meeting their necessary expenditure for joining the army.⁶⁵ Similarly, Thorburn's inquiry also revealed that many *zamundars* of Sialkot alienated their small fragmented holdings before going to the Chenab Colony. They subsequently invested mortgage money in the cultivation of their newly canal tracts.

Transfers of lands were also greatly responsible for a general mobility among the village artisans and menials like the *tarkhans*, *lohars* and *chamars*. In the rural society acquisition of land by way of sale or mortgage offered them a unique opportunity of raising their social status. This process of land acquisition was going on during Sikh rule. Now the brisk land market of this period encouraged them to purchase land and to invest their savings in it. Naturally, the land transfer suggested a salutary process in the rural society of the Punjab. Of all the artisans the *tarkhans* in particular merit special attention. They by virtue of their superior technical skill could earn their livelihood from different sources and often invested a part of their savings in land purchase. The *tarkhans* represented an enterprising group of cultivators and transfers of land to them generated a healthy process in the rural society. In the districts of Ludhiana, Lahore and Sirsa they acquired a considerable tract of land under the official classifications 'new-agriculturists.' In Gurdaspur also they acquired land and the settlement officer did not fail to make note of it.⁶⁶

But this process of land transfers was largely retarded when the Land Alienation Act came into effect in 1901. Under this Act village artisans and menials were deliberately excluded from the list of notified agricultural tribes. Now many of them applied to the government for their inclusion in this list. The government, how-

64 Remarks by E. B. Francis, D. C. Ferozepore, *E.R.R.* 1893-94, p. 9.

65 Note by F. A. Robertson, Director of Land Records and Agriculture, Punjab, *Report on Agricultural Indebtedness and Transfers of Land*, Rev and Agr (LR) November 1898, 3-22A.

66 Remarks by L. W. Dane, D. C. Gurdaspur, *E.R.R.* 1888-89, p. 16.

ever, refused to treat many of them as agricultural tribes. Under the circumstances, the Act may be said to have greatly restricted the general trend of social mobility among the village artisans and menials which had been going on since the time of Sikh rule.

VII. *Conclusions*

The effects of land transfers on the rural society were thus often of a mixed nature. In the *tahsils* of Jagadhri (Ambala) or Batala (Gurdaspur) where much of the transferred area passed into the hands of the *sahukars*, its result was largely the creation of a parasitic group merely living on rents from their purchased holdings. But the alienations of lands by the inefficient Rajputs, Gujars and Dogars to enterprising Jats and Mali proprietors in the *tahsils* of Moga and Pipli were destined to have a salutary effect on the rural economy. On the contrary, land was now mostly transferred from one group of *zamindars* who could not make use of it as best as possible to another group who could use it effectively and its effects on agricultural production were likely to have been healthy. Here this process marked a transfer of ownership to *zamindars* who usually commanded greater capital and energy to be invested in cultivating these lands which the Rajputs and the Gujars often refused to undertake. Similarly the passing out of lands to the enterprising *sahukars* in Multan made for the development of efficient agricultural units. These alienations of lands did not necessarily suggest that the *sahukars* were always 'stony hearted' or 'cruel' money-lenders, very little interested in the improvement of their lands.⁶⁷ They undertook various improvements and rendered cultivation secure in the arid tract of the province. Consequently transfers of lands did not necessarily result in depressing agriculture.

67 Opinion by H. J. Maynard, D.C. Ambala, 13 December 1901, Proceedings of Home (Judicial) Department, October 1902, 225-226A.

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PERMANENT SETTLEMENT IN BIRBHUM : IMPACT ON LANDED INTERESTS (1793-1856)

RANJAN KUMAR GUPTA

1.1. *Introduction :*

The Permanent Settlement was introduced in Birbhum in the background of a protracted civil rebellion from 1786-1793 which broke out not long after the great Bengal famine of 1769-70¹. The famine brought the economy of the district to a virtual collapse. As a result of heavy mortality a vast portion of the cultivable land lay uncultivated for want of ryots; rural manufactures decayed due to lack of artisans; and trade and commerce languished. Despite this very dismal picture, the Company Government did scarcely relent its policy of maximization of revenue. In fact, while the famine carried off 25% of the villages of the district², the revenue demand of the company increased by 54% in 1776 over the amount of 1769³ and the actual collections decreased only by 5.9%.⁴ The old Zamindar of Birbhum, who bore the title of 'Raja' granted by the Nawab of Bengal, pressed his pauperized ryots as hard as possible in order to meet the revenue demand of the Government and save his Zamindari from liquidation. This merely aggravated the situation and led mass-scale desertion of the ryots from the district. The economic squeeze of the Government and the extortion of the Zamindar coupled with some other crucial

1 For a detailed study of the Famine of 1770 in Birbhum and the subsequent Civil rebellion see my Ph.D. dissertation, 'The Economic Life of a Bengal District : Birbhum, 1793-1857', pp. 34-72.

2 O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer : Birbhum* (Calcutta, 1910) p. 17. 1,500 villages vanished within two years of famine out of about 6,000 villages recorded in 1785.

3 The Government demand in 1769 was Sa. Rs. 7,25,000. Historical introduction' in Firminger, W.K. ed. *The Fifth Report*, I, Calcutta, 1917, p. CLXXX. footnote, which increased to Sa. Rs. 11,14,820 in 1776. Vide—W. W. Hunter : *The Annals of Rural Bengal* (London, 1869) p. 6 (Hereafter cited as *The Annals*). Hunter gives the figure in pound sterling which I have converted into sicca rupees.

4 The actual collection in 1769 was Sa. Rs. 6,73,806 (J. Sherburne, Collector of Birbhum, to J. Shore, President, BOR, 18.1.1788) while the receipts in 1776 were Sa. Rs. 6,33,500. Vide—Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

factors drove the district to a civil rebellion of great dimension and intensity. This had further worsened the situation, and the Raja, unable to collect his mofussil Jama, failed to clear off his dues to the Government and suffered imprisonment more than once. Under the Decennial Settlement of 1790 the Sadar Jama of the district was arbitrarily fixed at a high amount of Sa. Rs. 6,50,000. It was, indeed, an excessive assessment in view of the deserted and distracted state of the district, and the very desperate financial condition of the Raja. The Raja pathetically entreated the Board of Revenue to lower the sadar jama, but in vain⁵. Troubles intensified as the Raja attempted to enforce the exorbitant established rate of rent. There was renewed desertion from the district, and many of the ryots refused to pay rent. The farmers and under-farmers, naturally, failed in their engagements. And the Zamindar continued to be a defaulter.

In this background of the district the Permanent Settlement came into effect on March 22, 1793—a landmark in the history of the Bengal Presidency as a whole. The operation of the Permanent Settlement in Birbhum, as in other districts of Bengal, was anything but smooth and peaceful. In this paper an attempt has been made to examine the hazards attendant on the operation of the Permanent Settlement and the consequential impact on the Zamindar and the ryot.

2.1. *Decline of the Old Zamindar :*

His financial difficulties :

As the permanent settlement commenced in Birbhum, Raja Muhammad-us-zaman Khan, the Zamindar of the district, was encumbered with a balance of Sa. Rs. 70,451-12⁶ due to Government. Of the amount Rs. 40,451-12 were the arrears for the current year of 1793 and Rs. 30,000 for last year's suspension on account of severe and extensive drought⁷. The drought lingered resulting in reducing the size of cultivation and the Zamindar, the Collector wrote, became "totally without resources", as "almost all" of the farmers and under

5. Enclosure in a letter from Collr to BOR, 20.4.1790.

6. C. Keating to BOR, 27.4.1793.

7. B. B. Mukherjee . *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement operation in the district of Birbhum 1924-1932* (Calcutta, 1937), p. 51.
Keating in his letter to BOR dated 27.4.1793 stated that the Zamindar actually granted a sum of Rs. 40,000.

renter failed in their engagement to him⁸. Sale of his estates was therefore thought to be the only means of realizing the balance. Muhammad-uz-zaman was imprisoned in May, 1793 for being a defaulter; some of his estates were put up for sale. Henceforth sale of land became a common practice for the liquidation of outstanding balance of the Zamindari.

The situation was extremely difficult, and the Raja could scarcely cope with it. An illiterate youngman, he was also guilty of "notorious profligacy", "egregious folly and weakness"⁹. Many of his officials and confidants were "possessed of infinite low cunning and intrigue and [were] unrivalled in the arts of fraud and litigation . . ."¹⁰ But none of them appears to have helped him in his efforts to meet the Government demand. His own machinery to collect rent failed, and he contracted huge loans from the Calcutta banians and mahajans, mortgaging some of his mahals to them. Among his creditors were some of his own top-ranking amlas. For instance, Swarupsing, one of the "finest and most profitable purganah in the whole Zamindary" bearing a Sadar Jama of Sa. Rs. 66,345 was mortgaged to Shyam Charan Chakravarty, the Zamindar's Diwan and a banian of Calcutta, for Sa. Rs. 30,000 in 1794¹¹. Shyam Chakravarty was also the mortgagee of the noabad (newly cultivated) lands¹². He was a man of the Acting Collector, T. H. Ernst, (in fact, Ernst recommended his name) and was "never in attendance" in Birbhum¹³. Jagamohon Singh, one of the leading men of the Raipur house, advanced a large loan of Rs 50,000/- to the Raja in distress and the Raja in liquidation of his debt was obliged to sell two more of his most profitable mahals, Pargana Senbhum and Taluk Supur (Sadar Jama being Sa. Rs. 26,327 and 12,398-10 respectively) to Jagamohon in 1203 B.Y. (1796-97)¹⁴. T. Brooke, the District Judge, reported in May, 1794, that large portions of the Raja's estate were mortgaged "and consequently abandoned by men of credit and character who will not accept the manage-

8. C.Oldfield, Collr. of Birbhum, to C.Keating, Ag. Collr. of Burdwan, 25.5.1793.

9. Collr. to BOR, 4.11.1794. Vide B. B. Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

10 Ibid.

11 T. H. Ernst, Ag. Collr., to BOR, 12.6.1794; 2.12.1795.

12 Petition of the Raja Muhammad-uz-zaman Khan enclosed in a letter from Ernst to BOR, 23.9.1795. DJC.

13 Ibid.

14 G. Purling, Collr., to T. Brooke, Dist. Judge, 21.1.1797. DJC.

ment of a dismembered estate ...¹⁵ The arrears due to the Government continued to grow. In January, 1795 the balance amounted to two lakhs¹⁶. As the year ended, "of the whole arrears outstanding for the province 'about one half is due' from the great Zamindaries of Birbhum and Rajshahi"¹⁷. The Collector in view of the "incapacity" of the Zamindar to manage his estate had already recommended to the Board of Revenue that he be declared disqualified¹⁸. In May, 1795 Muhammad-uz-zaman Khan was proclaimed unfit to be the Zamindar of Birbhum, and T. H. Ernst was appointed Commissioner to the Zamindari with its sole charge¹⁹.

2.2. *The Raja declared unfit to be the Zamindar of Birbhum:*

Ascertainment of his Zamindari assets :

The preparation of a *hastabud* or ascertainment of assets of the district was the principal duty of Ernst. He was entrusted with the assignment of dividing the Zamindari into several lots, apportioning *jama* for each, so that the requisite number could be put up to sale for realizing the arrears due from the Zamindari²⁰. It was a difficult assignment. There was no sufficient number of Patwaries (accountants) to ascertain "the actual produces" of the Zamindari²¹. The Raja expressed his inability to appoint them on ground of financial stringency. The patwaries, nevertheless, were employed, and in 1796 the Commissioner reported that there were more than four hundred patwaries working in the district²². All of them were *Kutkenadar* (under-farmers) turned patwari,²³ a thoroughly unscrupulous and corrupt lot. "Men of superior rank and education", they, as revenue-farmers, had already resumed most of the remissions granted to the ryots and the rest resumed by the superior ryots who employed labourers to cultivate

15 District Judge to BOR, 26.5.1794 DJC.

16 Collr. to BOR, 20.1.1795

17 W. W. Hunter : *Bengal Manuscript Records, Vol. I* (London 1894) pp. 100-101.

18 Ag. Collr. to BOR, 4.11.1794.

19 W. W. Hunter : *Bengal Manuscript Records, Vol. II* (London, 1894) p. 125.

20 Extract from the resolutions of the Governor General-in-Council in the Revenue Deptt., under date the 9th October, 1795, enclosed in a letter from Secy., BOR to Ernst dated 14.10.1795,

21 Ag Collr. to BOR, 5.5.1794.

22 T. H. Ernst, Commissioner in-charge of the Zamindari of Birbhum (hereafter cited as Commr. : Birbhum) to BOR, 5.2.1796.

23 Commr. : Birbhum to BOR, 16.9.1795.

their lands²⁴. The Commissioner indignantly reported to the Board that "every Putwarry ... has incurred the guilt of perjury" and sent a list of them "for exemplary punishment" as they should be "made examples of for having delivered in false and erroneous accounts of the mehals under their charge ..."²⁵ The Patwaries' accounts being the main basis of the *hastabud* its reliability was presumably open to doubt. Moreover, in the backdrop of a bitter conflict of authority²⁶ between the Commissioner Ernst, and the Collector Fitzroy, the two officers were inclined to inflate the assets of the Zamindari in their respective *hastabuds*.

Certain facts came to light while the *hastabud* was being prepared. First, in regard to the complaint of the Birbhum Raj and the observation of Keating in 1793²⁷ it was admitted that the Sadar instalments (Kis'bandi) in vogue were defective to the extent of being oppressive to the Zamindar, some of them (Kists) being higher than the *mofussil*

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Before his appointment as Commissioner to the Birbhum Zamindari, T. H. Ernst had officiated for 15 months as Collector of the district during the absence of F. Fitzroy, the permanent incumbent. As Fitzroy resumed the charge of the district in April, 1795 from Ernst and the latter was given the sole charge of the Birbhum Zamindari, the relationship between the two was marked by mutual antipathy, which subsequently matured into animosity. There were ostensible elements of parallel authority in the situation Ernst held, and the incumbent was fully aware of, and very much zealous to maintain, them. The bitterness pervaded all spheres of their activities. The two officers prepared their separate *hastabuds* and submitted them to the Board of Revenue pleading their own to be very much accurate and the other's containing incorrect data or undervaluation of the Zamindari assets. The Collector and the Commissioner lodged charges and counter-charges against each other to the Board. The in-fighting between the two officers threatened to hamper the normal working of the administration and undermine prestige of the Government. The Board and the Governor General-in-Council evidently annoyed at the state of affairs came to intervene. The Governor General-in-Council by a resolution dated October 9, 1795, while reserving their decision respecting the charges preferred by the two contending officers until investigation, dismissed Fitzroy from the office of Collector and ordered Ernst to officiate as Commissioner and also to take charge of other business of collectorship until the new incumbent arrived. Vide Ag. Collr. to BOR, 30.12.1793; Collr. to BOR, 8.4.1795; Commr. : Birbhum to BOR, 22.8.1795; Collr. to BOR, 20.9.1795; Commr. : Birbhum to Collr., 24.9.1795; Collr. to Commr. : Birbhum, 26.9.1795 and Progs. BOR, 14.10.1795. BRR.

27 Collr. to BOR, 1.7.1793.

collections. What was refused to the Raja was granted to the later landlords. Ernst readjusted the monthly Kists for the payment of Government revenue "to the facilities of the landholders in realizing the rents from the ryots during the several months in the year ..." ²⁸ Since then no change was made in regard to the demand of revenue in each instalment ²⁹.

Secondly, the steady decline of the revenue of the district from 1786-1795 (1193-1202 B.Y.) was recognised to be an undeniable fact ³⁰. In 1791 and 1792 alone the decrease amounted to Rs. 1,61,967 ³¹ which was occasioned by various remissions the Raja was constrained to grant to his ryots "in revolt" and the fact that the lands deserted by the palataka (absconding) ryots could not be cultivated. But neither the Collector nor the Commissioner was disposed to admit that the loss of revenue had been the main difficulty in the Birbhum Zamindari. In their opinion the Zamindar freely resorted to illegal alienation of lands, and in the estimate of Fitzroy his annual income from Zamindari was not less than Rs 69,748-13 (including Rs 18,563 being the income from Khas lands) ³². Ernst raised the estimated amount to Rs 72,853 excluding Rs 3,853 on the head of "gosain tackee" ³³.

Thirdly, in his *hastabud* Ernst calculated the gross revenue of the Zamindari to be Sa. Rs. 8,25,967 ³⁴, besides noabad lands valuing Sa. Rs. 60,854 ³⁵ that were mortgaged to Shyam Sing Diwan. However, ironically enough, Ernst himself confessed that the resources in the *hastabud* were "swelled ... beyond what it is possible to realize" ³⁶. He wrote to the Board of Revenue :

... about 1/3 of the whole increase I could have wished indiscreet and originally intended to have reduced it to be

28 A. C. Barwell, Collr. to Watters, Commissioner of Revenue of the 14th Division (hereafter cited as "Commr."), 8.7.1836.

29 *Ibid.*

30 Commr. : Birbhum to BOR, 22.8.1795.

31 *Ibid.*

32 *Ibid.*

33 From same to same, 14.10.1795. Ernst defined the *gosain taki* to be a cess of "one pye in the rupee (on the mofussil juma) voluntarily paid by the Ryotts for the support of Hindu priests and their Religious establishments . . ."

34 Supplemental *hastabud* of lands and jama of the Zamindari of Birbhum sent by the Commr. : Birbhum to BOR, 20.1.1796. DJC.

35 Commr. : Birbhum to BOR, 2.12.1795.

36 *Ibid.*

standard of what might be collected with facility and without any oppression to the Ryotts by excluding from my Hustabood two or three remissions which it would, I think be unjust and certainly very dangerous, and impolitick to resume, particularly that denominated Gard Kumee, because it was granted in order to induce the Ryotts to bring waste land into cultivation and if the Jummabundy rates were enforced the consequence would certainly be that the Ryotts would abscond and cultivation receive a check which it could require much time and great encouragement to recover.

Inspite of this correct understanding the remissions had been resumed. And why? The Commissioner was frank enough to add :

But as I was convinced that such exceptions were liable to abuses and that other remissions of a very different nature might be collusively included under that head by the Mohurrirs [clerks/accountants] employed in adjusting the accounts I thought it better on mature consideration to comprise them in it . . .³⁷

It was certainly not a worthy method to counter the collusion of the mohurers. The real motive behind over-rating the assets of the Zamindari appears to tempt the prospective purchasers of the impoverished estate to a ruinous gamble.

2.3. *The rigorous Sale law in operation :*

The working of the rigorous sale law started very soon. The Zamindari divided into lots, each of ten, fifteen or more villages, was sold at auction. The consummation of the process was not late in coming. In February, 1799, Collector Purling enclosing a statement of lands for sale grimly announced : "... the Rajah has no more *malguzarry* lands exclusive of Sarhett in the district"³⁸ It was later learned that the Ganutea Mehal of the Raja was let on lease to Frushard, the Commercial Agent of the Company, Sarhet-Deoghar being under the management of the Collector³⁹. The Chakran lands were in possession of the purchasers of the *malguzari* (revenue-paying) lands and were recommended by the Collector to be sold for liquidation of the arrears due from the Raja⁴⁰ He was completely

37 *Ibid.*

38 Collr. to BOR, 2.4.1799.

39 Collr. to BOR, 24.11.1801.

40 *Ibid.*

incapable of supporting his very large family without financial assistance from the Government. After much fuss pension was granted. But the amount of pension decreased in the following years inspite of the increasing penury of the Raj family. In 1795, when the Zamindari was held under attachment the Raja and his family were favoured with monthly allowances totalling Rs. 2,500 (or Rs. 30,000 annually), Rs. 1,500 for the former and Rs. 1,000 for the latter.⁴¹ In 1802, inspite of the fact that the Zamindar was destitute of any revenue-paying lands the amount of pension for the entire family was reduced to Rs. 500 a month or Rs. 6,000 a year.⁴² In 1849 it was just Rs. 93-15-8 monthly or Rs. 1,127-13-7 annually.⁴³ The Raj family was in a pitiable condition. A newly-wedded youth of the family could not "stoop to any menial employment for his support" just because he was a nephew of the Raja.⁴⁴ The Raja as early as 1801 had incurred debts to the tune of Rs 50,000 and Rs 60,000.⁴⁵ The Collector reported : ". . . he has no means of subsistence . . . except by what he gets begging as I hear he now finds it impossible to borrow money on account of the desperate state of his affairs."⁴⁶

Thus ended one of the most powerful Zamindari houses of the 18th century Bengal; and it is worthwhile to note that it took only two years since the introduction of the Permanent Settlement to make the house bankrupt and six years to reduce it to beggary.⁴⁷

41 Commr. : Birbhum to BOR, 11.9.1795; proceedings of the Commissioner of the Birbhum Zamindari, 25.12.1795.

42 E. G. Drakes-Brockman : *Notes an early administration of the district of Birbhum*, p. 12.

43 J. Reid, Collr. to T. Taylor, Commr. 14.3.1849.

44 Drakes-Brockman : *op. cit.*; p. 12.

45 Collr to BOR, 24.11.1801.

46 *Ibid.*

47 The fate of the Birbhum Zamindari seems to contradict the view of Professor Bernard Cohn that despite sale of the estates, dispossessed Zamindars could retain much of their old social and economic position. In the case of the Raja of Birbhum the direct relationship between the possession of a Zamindari and a strong economic position was an obvious one and the decline in his economic fortunes, which the sale of his estates had brought about, could scarcely be arrested. (See, B. Cohn, 'Structural change in Indian Rural Society' in Robert Eric Frykenberg (ed.) : *Land control and Social structure in Indian History* (London, 1969). See section : 'The Dispossessed : 1793-1885', particularly pp. 111-114.

3. *Fragmentation of the Zamindari of Birbhum:*

3.1. *The Land market:*

Henceforward the process of fragmentation of the Zamindari into numerous estates proceeded rapidly. By 1799 the single Zamindari of Birbhum was split into 222 mahals comprised in 42 Parganas,⁴⁸ and in 1800 there were 233 registered proprietors in the district.⁴⁹ In 1809 the number of estates rose to 321,⁵⁰ and in course of next forty years it had nearly doubled (650).⁵¹ The proprietors had also correspondingly multiplied. In 1856 the larger part of the district having been transferred to Santal Parganas, there were 1,884 Zamindars in 23 parganas⁵²—more than eight times the figure of 1800.

The fragmentation of estates resulting from sale of lands tended to diminish rather than increase or stabilise the original Sadar jama at the early stage. While the Permanent Settlement of the district was made at a Sadar Jama of Sa. Rs. 6,50,000/- subject to reduction of sair collections which were abolished, in July 1793 the Collector showed the revenue demand to be Sa. Rs. 6,29,897-12⁵³ which in 1795 fell further low to 6,23,000.⁵⁴ The quinquennial Register of 1799 recorded the revenue demand to be Sa. Rs. 6,91,824-14,⁵⁵ but the increase, in fact, originated from the transfer of a number of mahals from Murshidabad to Birbhum in 1794 bearing a Sadar jama of Sa. Rs. 68,622.⁵⁶ The loss of Government revenue was due to the diminution in the value that the lands suffered⁵⁷ in course of troubled

48 B. B. Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

49 O'Malley : *Birbhum Gazetteer*, p. 87.

50 Collr. of Murshidabad to Secy. to the BOR, 22.4.1819.

51 Collr. of Birbhum to Commr., 13.3.1851.

52 R. J. Wigram, Offg Magistrate & Collector of Birbhum, to Commr., 5.5.1856

53 Collr. to BOR, 1.7.1793.

54 Commr. . Birbhum to BOR, 4.10.1795.

55 B. B. Mukherjee : *op. cit.*, p. 50.

56 A C Barwell, Collr., to Watters, Commr., 8.7.1836.

57 The sales records (Misc. Recrds, BOR, Vol 48/Account sale of lands in Birbhum, 1795-1807. BRR) bring out graphically the behaviour of land market in the district. In the first year of the auction sale (1795) the purchase money more or less covered the Sadar Jama i.e the Government revenue. Three mahals of Raja Ramkrishna of Nadia situated in Birbhum were sold at Rs. 10,045 against the total Government revenue of 10,415. (*Ibid.*

years, and it also required no small amount of audacity to purchase the property of the Raja at the auction sale. In many cases, therefore, "the purchase money paid for the lands sold, was less than the amount of revenue payable on them".⁵⁸

However, before the close of the first decade of the Nineteenth century there were ostensible signs of stability, even improvement, in the Government revenue collections. In 1809 the Sadar jama of the district including the resumed thanadari was Sa. Rs. 7,68,463.⁵⁹ The value of the lands did also gradually rise.⁶⁰ Since then the district underwent a number of jurisdictional changes. Natural calamities, such as floods and droughts, had come and passed over leaving behind trails of economic ills. But in the period searches for additional sources of government revenue did not relent. So in 1851, inspite of

p. 3). In 1796 with the increasing number of sales and with new purchasers flocking in, the land market had a more buoyant look. In February, 1796 five mahals of the Birbhum Raja carrying a sadar jama of 71,016 were sold for Rs. 85,026 (*Ibid.* p. 7). Prices rose further by the end of the year. For example, Taluk Sonakpur bearing a Sadar jama of Rs 14,403 which was purchased in September by one Golab Das of Birbhum at Rs. 25,000 fetched in November, on his being a defaulter, a sum of Rs 32,250 from Krishna Charan Chakravarty, a banian and an "inhabitant of Sootanooty in Calcutta". (*Ibid.* pp 15-17). The boom lasted upto the first phase of auction sale on April 3, 1797, and then the bubble burst. The land prices at the auction registered a sudden and sharp fall. In very many cases the purchase money was from 50 to 100% less than the Sadar Jama; in case of a large and once-prosperous estate of Indoss the decrease was more than 250%—the sale was at Rs. 4,000 only against the Sadar jama of Rs. 10,697 (*Ibid.* p. 33). The year 1798 was no less disastrous. Seventy nine mahals carrying a total Sadar jama of Rs. 2,13,602-15 were sold in the year at an amount of Rs. 1,89,156—a loss of Rs. 24,446 (computation ours). The picture did not change in 1799-1800. Many mahals were undersold and many more remained unsold for nobody bidding for them (*Ibid.* pp. 72-187).

58 Drakes-Brockman, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

59 Collr. of Murshidabad to BOR, 22 4.1819.

60 Since 1801, thanks to Reg. VII of 1799, the proprietors appeared to have got some respite. The number of mahals put at auction did not decrease, but a large number of them was not actually sold, since the defaulters cleared off their arrears at the time of auction. Gradually the value of landed property increased. In May 1803, while under-valuation was still the dominant feature of the landed property, Mahal choar Murah (Sadar Jama being Rs. 614) was purchased at Rs 1,150 (vide Misc. Records BOR, Vol. 48). In 1823 one Izmali Mahal was sold at Rs. 925, the Sadar jama being Rs. 149, (Msc. Records, BOR, No. 65), p. 130.

jurisdiction changes and financial vicissitudes of the past few years, the land revenue could be kept at the height of Sa. Rs. 7,66,155.⁶¹ And in 1856 though the district lost by them more than half of its previous territory the land revenue remained, surprisingly enough, at the figure of Rs. 7,65,791-13.⁶²

4. *The New Zamindars :*

4.1. *Composition :*

Those who hastened to purchase different mahals of Birbhum Zamindari were not entirely strangers in the field. The Collector wrote in 1802 to the Secretary to the Government in Judicial and Revenue Department :

The greatest part of the purchasers of the lands disposed of at public sale in this district are persons who have held situations under the Rajahs of Beerbhoom, the rest are merchants and persons that have been in the service of the different Zemindars.⁶³

A few of them were government amlas who purchased lands in others' names; some, like Srinibash Sargar of Surul (near Santiniketan) who purchased a mahal in 1799,⁶⁴ were servants of the commercial factories and filatures. There were a few Calcutta banians, the most prominent of whom was Ashutosh De who in 1828/1829 purchased Pargana Shahallumpur from Guruprasad Bose, son of Krishnaram Bose, a salt dealer in Calcutta.⁶⁵ The Collector reported in 1802 that the new proprietors were mostly Hindus and except for a small number, inhabitants of the district.⁶⁶ Among the outsiders, the purchasers from the districts of Burdwan and Murshidabad held a sizeable portion.⁶⁷ Leaving aside the merchants who with no previous idea about their new venture may have blundered into speculative investment of their funds in landed property, the erstwhile Zamindari amlas now turned new Zamindars had considerable expe-

61 Collr. of Birbhum to Commr., 13.3.1851.

62 R. G. Wigram, Offg. Mge. and Collr. to Commr. 5.5.1856.

63 Corvell, Collr., to the Secy. to the Govt. in Judicial and Revenue Deptt., 10.2.1802.

64 Collr. to BOR, 21.4.1799.

65 Collr. to Commr., 14.8.1830.

66 Collr. to Secy. to the Govt. in Judicial & Rev. Deptt., 10.2.1802.

67 List of purchasers with address. Vide Misc. Records, BOR, Vol. 48, BRR.

rience to manage estates. However, they could scarcely cope with the new system which was introduced after 1793. Ruthless rigidity and a sense of urgency were two keynotes of the new system. Unlike the former system, it made no allowances for dilatoriness of the ryots or of the Zamindars, individual or collective inconvenience arising out of natural calamities or any other exigencies. Such rigidity of rules was sure to play greater havoc in a desolate district like Birbhum.

4.2. *Difficulties of the new purchasers :*

The new purchaser found to their dismay many of their estates grievously rack-rented. The ryots were either incapable of, or unwilling to pay their dues. The superior ryots or Mandals, holding a crucial position in the mechanism of collection of land revenue were, as the Collector informed, "withholding for a time the payments of the rents to the Zamindars".⁶⁸ The slow-moving, dilatorious and semi-illiterate band of Zamindars had to face the consequences. There are instances of estates being sold for arrears when the defaulters were just counting and weighing the amount for payment in a leisurely manner at the Court premises.⁶⁹ There are also the charges of collusion between the Collectorate amlas and the powerful Zamindars resulting in the ruin of petty landlords.⁷⁰ Nor the collusion between the former and the Zamindari amlas was uncommon. Absentee landlordism was the dominant feature of the district.⁷¹ The Zamindars far away from their estates lived "in idleness and debauchery".⁷² and the Zamindari amlas the *naibs* and *gomastas* were left much to themselves. Most of them were admittedly corrupt and unscrupulous. They earned a considerable income from various perquisites, customary and extortionate, while their salary was meagre. They, as well as their masters, used to carry on money-lending business with mofussil collections generally at the rate of 30% per annum.⁷³ While the Government rate of interest on arrears was 12%, the temptation understandably was irresistible to defer the Sadar jama till the last moment.⁷⁴ Instances abound in which the

68 G. Purling, Collr. to BOR, 29.11.1800.

69 Taylor, Collr. to Money, Commr. 16.8.1828 ; 25.2.1830.

70 *Ibid.*

71 S. Bowering, Dist. Magistrate, to Dampier, Supdt. of Police, (S.P.) 13.7.1840.

72 Atherton, Dist. Mge., to Smith, S.P., 25.10.1839.

73 W. N. Garrett, Acting Collr. to BOR, 22.8.1823.

74 *Ibid.*

last moment was wilfully allowed to pass over and the naibs or muktears themselves purchased the mahals at auction at a lower jama in their name or benami.⁷⁵ The lots of most of the resident Zamindars were not better either. They were, in official report, "generally distressed for money".⁷⁶ Experiencing other difficulties common with the class in the period, the fate of the resident Zamindars was probably rendered a bit worse by the traditional and paternal obligations to their ryots which they could not completely shun. Their physical presence and keeping touch with the ryots, too, stood in the way of their growing too much exacting.

Over and above, there were the natural calamities.⁷⁷ In the prevailing narrow and restricted market conditions prices fluctuated wildly during such times. High prices due to scarcity, real or artificial, of the food grains caused hardships to the lesser ryots and hampered collection of rent.⁷⁸ Sudden and sharp fall of the prices of corn likewise adversely affected the big and middle ryots, causing much loss of land revenue. In 1836 the Collector accounted for the delay of the Zamindars in paying government revenue to the "over production of grains" that occasioned steep fall of prices "to one half of what it was last year".⁷⁹

4.3. *Economic crises and their effects on land and landed interests :*

Economic crises of greater magnitude affecting the British India and the empire as a whole did not leave the district unscathed. Their disastrous effects could particularly be seen on landed property. Two occasions are cited here in order to emphasize the point. The military operations launched by Moira—the Nepal War, the Maratha War, the expeditions against the Pindaries etc.—put the Bengal finances under heavy strain. It was further accentuated by the loss of opium and salt revenue at home, decrease of export of Indian Calicoes and fall

75 Collr. to Commr., 16.8.1828.

76 Dist. Mge. to S.P., 16.3.1840.

77 During our period severe drought and flood of the Ajay and the Mor occurred in the following years :

Drought : 1792, 1799-1800, 1803, 1807, 1813, 1827, 1828, 1829, 1836-1837, 1851, 1855.

Flood : 1806, 1816, 1840, 1856.

78 For price fluctuations in agricultural produce, see my doctoral dissertation, pp. 56-57

79 Barwell, Collr., to Gordon, Commr., 20.2.1836.

of importation of English bullion from 1817/1818.⁸⁰ As a result, there was shortage of money in Bengal and the price of land registered a fall in Birbhum. Again, the economic depression in England between 1826 and 1833 with temporary and intermittent recovery nearly paralysed the Bengal trade and finance eventually leading to the ruin of the redoubtable agency houses. There was an acute scarcity of capital which was felt, among other classes, "even by the native Zamindars, who dabbled in indigo and by those who carried on internal trade".⁸¹ With regard to the financial crisis, Money, formerly Acting Magistrate and Collector and then officiating as Magistrate of Birbhum, wrote to Scott, the officiating Commissioner of Revenue, in April, 1835 :

The diminution in the importation of Bullion into India since the year 1818/1819 has worked more serious effects upon landed property which has decreased certainly one quarter and in some instances more than one half in value"⁸².

In support of his contention he cites a concrete example :

An estate in this district paying an annual sadar jama of 6435 was put up for sale for arrears of revenue a few years ago when two lacks of Rupees were bid for it, the same estate was put up for sale for the same cause a few months ago when only 50,000 Rs. were bid⁸³.

This arose, the Magistrate opined, from the "scarcity of money" that "affected the conditions of all classes of the native community from the respectable Zamindars to the meanest cultivators of the soil".

4.4. *Attachment and Sales of Estates to realize arrears of Government revenue :*

Under the circumstances arrears of government revenue accumulated, followed up by attachment and sale of lands of the new zamindars. In 1206 B.Y. (1799/1800 A.D.) the balance of the district for the months of *Pous* (December/January), *Magh* (January/February) and *Phalgun* (February/March) amounted, respectively, to Rs. 96,518 ;

⁸⁰ A. Tripathi : *Trade and finance in Bengal Presidency* (Calcutta, 1956), pp. 162, 165-67.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁸² W. J. H. Money, formerly Ag Mge. and Collr, now offg. Mge, to R. H. Scott, Offg. Commr. of Revenue, 15.4.1835.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Rs78,693; and Rs 84,693-10,⁸⁴ amount of balance being 92% on the average of the sadar jama for above three months⁸⁵. For nine years, from 1814/15 to 1823/24, Rs 23,132 were collected as interest on arrears at the rate of 12% per annum,⁸⁶ the annual average standing at Rs 2,570. The years of drought and distress naturally added to the size of arrears and the number of auction sale of property. In 1827/1828 the year that witnessed one of the worst droughts of the century, 1,099 sale notifications were issued⁸⁷, and in 1828/1829 the number of defaulting estates was 250, bearing a total sadar jama of Rs. 4,83,995⁸⁸ covering 70% of land revenue of the district⁸⁹. In 1238 B.Y. (1831) the revenue arrears for the month of *Aughran* (November/December) was Rs. 1,32,638⁹⁰, "an increase of Rs. 8,205 on the amount of balance outstanding in the preceding year". Five years later (1243 B.Y. or 1836/1837) the *Aughran* and *Pous tauzis* (November/December and December/January) exhibited an arrear of Rs 2,10,000⁹¹. More than 50% of the sadar jama thus fell due during these months.

4.5. *Landlords in the grip of usurers:*

The Zamindars as a matter of course fell back upon the usurious moneylenders to discharge their dues "on any terms however extortionary"⁹². It was infact the usual practice with the petty proprietors. In the great recession of the 1830s it is seen, the big Zamindars were not spared. Guruprasad Bose, one of the biggest Zamindars of the district, had, for instance, contracted a loan of Rs 40,000 from Dwarkanath Tagore of Calcutta "upon his bond and warrant of attorney payable in two years with interest at 12%" and as a further security for repayment of the principal sum and interest

84 Collr. to BOR. 24.2.1800; 20.3.1800; 20.4.1800.

85 *Kists* for *Pous*, *Magh* and *Phalgun* were, respectively as follows: *Pous* Rs. 2,18,425; *Magh* Rs. 33,520; *Phalgun* Rs. 31,665.

86 Collr. to BOR, 22.12.1824.

87 Taylor, Collr., to M. W. Money, Commr., 26.6.1829.

88 Same to some, 10.2.1830. The letter recommending remission of fines and penalties levied on defaulting Zamindars was not, for unknown reason, dispatched.

89 Land Revenue of the district was Rs. 6,91,876-12-1 vide Collr. to BOR, 22.12.1824.

90 Commr. to Collr., 12.4.1832. Revenue demand for the month of *Aughran* was Rs. 1,99,901-0-5.

91 Collr. to offg. Local Revenue Commr., 20.2.1836.

92 Wyt, Ag Collr., to BOR, 4.9.1822.

he had to mortgage to Dwarkanath "Talook called lot Cootoorah with its dependencies situated in the Zillah Beerbhoom together with other mal property"⁹³. In 1828/1829 Guruprasad was obliged to sell Parganas Duri Moureswar and Mollarpur to Maharani Kamal Kumari of Burdwan and Shahallampur to Ashutosh De of Calcutta⁹⁴.

But usurer's money could not stabilize the economic position of the distressed Zamindars. As we find, from May 1, 1834 to April 30, 1835, 2,565 sale notifications were issued involving about 214 mahals on the average per month⁹⁵.

4.6. *The Sale law controversy:*

Arrears and the consequent sale of lands were generally the concern of the petty landlords or the "muzkoory talookdars", as the Collector Wyatt designated them. They were men of limited resources, easily vulnerable to adverse circumstances. And they formed, with a few exceptions, the majority of the landed proprietors of the district.⁹⁶ Wyatt, the Acting Collector of Birbhum wrote in 1822:

. . . there are not above five or six Zemindars here the assessment of whose estates is of any magnitude and these bear the character of discharging their revenue with punctuality—the

93 J. H. Huges, Attorney to Dwarkanath Tagore. to Taylor, Collr. (undated, probably of January, 1830).

94 Collr. to Commr., 14.8.1830.

95 Collr. forwarded to the local Revenue Commr. (19.3.1835) the following *latbandis* of Mahals that were advertised for sale in the district for 1241 B.Y. (1834/35) :

Latbandis for 1241 B.Y. or from May 1, 1834 to April 30, 1835 :

Baisakh (April/May)	78 mahals advertised for sale.
Jaistha (May/June)	260 " "
Asar (June/July)	276 " "
Shravana and Bhadra (July/	
August and August/September)	213 " "
Aswin (September/October)	274 " "
Kartick (October/November)	191 " "
Augran (November/December)	194 " "
Pous (December/January)	294 " "
Magh (January/February)	249 " "
Falgon (February/March)	257 " "
Chaitra (March/April)	279
To be advertised for sale.	

96 Ag. Collr. to BOR, 9.9.1822.

defaulters whose estates are subject so constantly to be advertised for sale, fall under the head . . . of petty landholders designated muzkoory Talookdars.⁹⁷

Besides "innumerable family subdivisions", the sale law resulted in so rapid a fragmentation of estates that,

frequently the little produce that is available for consumption in some season of the year just suffices for their subsistence without leaving them the means of providing for those demands on the fulfilment of which the security of their landed interests depends.⁹⁸

Frequent sale and subdivision tended to cause devaluation of estates and produced ruinous effects on the economy in general and the Zamindar-ryot relationship in particular. Corvell, the Collector, admitted that "the lands of the proprietors being liable to sale for arrears of revenue certainly tends to affect the security and values of landed property", but he considered the effects damaging "not so much as previous to the promulgation of the 7th Regn : of 1799 : when the lands were liable to be sold for the deficiency in any one month's instalment".⁹⁹ At least one Collector, Taylor, appears to have been fully aware of the defects of the system and candidly recommends ". . . the sale of an estate or portions of an estate . . . generally attended with great and serious evils, and should, if possible, be avoided"¹⁰⁰. But the sale law was a part of the Permanent Settlement itself and could not be dispensed with. The rest of the Collectors praised efficacy of the course. W. J. H. Money observed in 1835 :

... the Zemindars do not pay their revenue from any principle of duty, but solely from the threat of sale, and in the absence of this regular stimulus they would ... become lax in their payments ...¹⁰¹

He eulogized the system and strove to show it up as a great benefactor to the lowly natives :

As the natives procrastinate all payments and needlessly and extravagantly dispose of their money, it is absolutely necessary to make them pay their revenue while they have it ... whereby

97 *Ibid.*

98 *Ibid.*

99 Collr. to the Secy to the Govt. in Judicial Deptt. 10.4.1802.

100 Collr. to Commr, 17.10.1829.

101 W. G. H. Money, Ag. Mge, to A. C. Barwell, Collr., 27.4.1835,

they are rescued from a load of interest and penalty . . . and in the end are enabled to liquidate the Government demand without losing their property and without being obliged to borrow money at an exorbitant interest to save it¹⁰².

Barwell, the Collector, confidently observed that the system was working well, and "the regularity with which the revenue is realized under the present system of advertising these estates for sale precludes the necessity of adopting any other course"¹⁰³.

5. *How did the new Zamindars survive and prosper :*

The Zamindars, too, learned at a heavy cost that the sale law had come to stay. The earlier proprietors were the worst sufferers, but the later ones learnt much from the experience of their predecessors and devised many an expedient for their survival and prosperity. It is revealing that while since the opening of the 19th century the number of proprietary interests increased with the constant process of subdivision of estates, a section of the Zamindars, notably Radhanath Chakraborty of Hetampur, Jagamohan Sing of Raipur, Srinibash Sarkar of Surul, Braja Mohon Roy of Dwarka, Golok Nath Chatterjee of Amrai and others, not only maintained their existence but increased their proprietary interests in course of time. The Zamindars, indeed, showed a considerable degree of adaptability and resilience.

What were the sources of their strength to brave the heavy odds? The answer was not far to seek.

5.1. *Better management of Estates :*

Appointment of inferior interest-holders viz., revenue farmers and Patni-Talukdars :

The new Zamindars made good many of the shortcomings in management of their estates. Better and economical management improved condition of some of them. Some other Zamindars, confronted with a section of recalcitrant ryots and difficulties in realizing rent, farmed out their mahals to revenue farmers¹⁰⁴ who were substantial and influential ryots. Lease-holders as they were, they undertook to collect rent and had pledged to pay the stipulated

102 *Ibid.*

103 Collr. to Commr, 29.6.1836.

104 Asstt. Collr. of Birbhum to Collr. of Birbhum and Murshidabad, 8.8.1816.

amount to the proprietors, appropriating the surplus. It was, as it seems, the continuation of a system that existed before and since the Permanent Settlement.

Side by side with this system the Patni taluk began to grow up in the district in the early years of the 19th century. It was a novel land tenure that was devised and put into operation by the Burdwan Raj in 1802 in his vast estate,¹⁰⁵ a part of which was situated in Birbhum. A Patni taluk was liable to be sold. In fact,

the main conditions of this tenure are the hypothecation of the land as security for the punctual payment of the rent and the liability of the tenure to summary sale in the event of default¹⁰⁶.

The Patnidars, in order to ease the rigour of their liability, created darpatnis or patnis of the second degree, and darpatnidars created se patnis or patnis of the third degree, and so on, upon the same terms and conditions. "In this manner there were in many instances, several gradations of Talukdars, each bound to pay rent to his superior and the highest bound to pay rent to the Raja"¹⁰⁷. The burden of the revenue demand tended to be heavier as it descended down-ward, and the ordinary ryots were the worst affected. Such middle men between the Zamindar and the ryot were, as Raja Rammohan Roy put on record in 1831, "much less merciful than the Zamindars"¹⁰⁸. The Burdwan Raj had introduced the Patni system in the mahals situated in the district of Birbhum,¹⁰⁹ which was subsequently followed by other Zamindars here. The system became so much wide-spread that by November, 1856 there were as many as 836 *Patni mahals* in the district¹¹⁰. The Patnidars began to face similar difficulties as the new Zamindars under the Permanent Settlement. The Patnidars, like the Zamindars, were in default owing to bad seasons and other

105 Extract of a letter from the Court of Directors under date of April 13, 1825, appended to the Progs., of the G.G. in Council in Judicial Deptt., dated 11.8.1825

106 J. C. K. Peterson : *Bengal District Gazetteers : Burdwan* (Calcutta, 1910) p 149.

107 Progs. of the G.G.-in-Council in Judicial Deptt., dated 11.8.1825.

108 S. C. Sarkar ed. *Rammohan Roy on Indian Economy* (1965), p. 10.

109 R. Morrison, Mge., to W. T. Smith, first Judge of the Provincial Court of Circuit for the Divn. of Murshidabad, 18.4.1820.

110 Offg. Collr. to Offg. Commr., 10.11.1856.

reasons,¹¹¹ and their lands were sold as a matter of course to new purchasers¹¹². In execution of summary decrees the practice of sale of under-tenures throughout the year began in 1841¹¹³. It was no doubt advantageous to the Zamindars. But "on the other hand", the Collector commented,

it presses hard upon the under-tenants to have their tenures liable to be put up to the Hammer at all seasons of the year by an ordinary and exacting landlord.¹¹⁴

Still, the system could not be thoroughly discarded. In the opinion of the Collector, it was helpful to the Zamindars, "especially to the less wealthy ones", in collecting rents and depositing them to the treasury in time. It was, therefore, advantageous also to the Government. In place of selling under-tenures "at all seasons of the year" causing distress to the tenants, the Collector suggested attachment of crops by the Zamindars, as was provided for by Act 5 of 1812. In the event of his rent not being paid by the end of the year, the Zamindar could also proceed against his tenants according to the provisions of clause 7 section 15, Regulation 7 of 1799. But the suggestion of the Collector fell on a deaf ear, and the Zamindars continued their practices at the cost of the under-tenure holders and the ryots.

5.2. *Reclamation of the waste and Jungle lands:*

Labouring hard under an excessive Government demand, the Zamindars looked upon the reclamation of waste and jungle lands in their estates as a stable and growing source of revenue. The process of deforestation had started at the close of the 18th century with the employment of seasonal labour of the aborigines, particularly the Santals,¹¹⁵ the semi-aboriginals and the low-caste Hindus. The process accelerated since the 1830s.¹¹⁶ As a result, a considerable part of the waste and jungle lands of the district was reclaimed and agriculture increased. The growth of agriculture, however limited in a way, added to the income of the Zamindars.

111 Stainforth, Offg. Collr., to Jackson, Commr., 14.3.1838.

112 Sale accounts of *Patni* and *Darpatni* lands prepared by F. Stainforth, Offg. Collr., 21.4.1838.

113 R. Abercombe, Offg. Collr., to Commr., 29.4.1853

114 *Ibid.*

115 Hunter, *The Annals* pp 222-24; L.S.S. O'Malley : *Bengal District Gazetteer : Santal Parganas* (Calcutta 1910), p. 45.

116 Mge. to Commr., 31.7.1832.

5.3. *The unassessed villages and mouzas :*

The Permanent Settlement was made without any survey and left many a village and mouza unassessed. The Assistant Collector of the district addressed in 1816 a letter to the Collector of Murshidabad on "concealed villages" which formed "one of wide extent in this Zillah".¹¹⁷ Indeed, at the period of making the Permanent Settlement, the assessment of the mahals had been made on the basis of the papers furnished by the Zamindar, which were, to a great extent, false and fraudulent. There was no provision for measurement of the estate to verify the Zamindar's statements. The Zamindar, wrote the Collector, "deceived" the Government by withholding papers relating to certain villages and mouzas which remained unassessed—"and their names even remain unknown to the officers of the Government".¹¹⁸ Furthermore, Ernst, while preparing his has'abud, had split up the Birbhum Zamindari in numerous *lats* without paying any attention to the prescribed rules for apportioning the assessment and caused several *lats* to be unduly profitable.¹¹⁹ The Assistant Collector in his letter dated March 17, 1814 pointed out that the whole jungle land of the district remained unassessed and formed the hidden treasure of the Zamindars.¹²⁰ Ernst, the Commissioner of the Birbhum Zamindari, however, detected "alienation" of a part of the jungle lands and entered in his has'abud a jama called Jungle Jama. He, unfortunately, distributed the aforesaid Jama quite wrongly amongst certain *lats* "without reference to the right of the proprietor of the *lats* to the jungle *Jummah* annexed to his estate".¹²¹ This, in subsequent years, created affrays and litigations amongst different Zamindars in establishing their respective claims and caused much oppression and exploitation of the ryots.

5.4. *Keeping Estates under fictitious names :*

There was a regular practice amongst the landlords to hold estates in fictitious names, or in names of others. Stainforth, the Collector, informed J. Lewis, the Commissioner of Revenue, in September, 1799 that the practice so much common in this district "originated from the year 1799 when the Raja's estate was divided and sold by auction".¹²²

117 Asstt. Collr. of Birbhum to Collr. of Murshidabad, 8.8.1816.

118 *Ibid.*

119 From same to same, 11.9.1816.

120 From same to same, 17.3.1814.

121 *Ibid.*

122 F. Stainforth, Collr., to J. Lewis, Commr., 19.9.1837.

The estates in default having been put up for sale were occasionally purchased at a price much below its normal valuation, by the defaulters themselves in names of servants, relations etc. Some of them were assigned to the family deities.

This latter practice [the Collector observed] in some degree resembling the ancient Jewish custom of *Kurbani* saves an estate from the sale in satisfaction of decrees of Court, though not for arrears of revenue.

Assigning a mahal to a family deity had multiple advantages. Firstly, the Zamindar could thereby avoid summons given by the Criminal Court to answer for neglect of duty. Secondly, it could prevent sale of estate of a debtor in satisfaction of decrees of the Court. Thirdly, it could prevent disputes of inheritance among the children. And fourthly, the Zamindars could thus easily keep off the solicitations of relations, friends and amlas who were required to pledge estates for their good conduct as public servants.¹²³ There were nevertheless, occasions when the Government detected cases of mahals purchased at prices less than their legitimate value and cancelled the sale,¹²⁴ but such were very few and far between. The *benami* estates became so common that the collectors could scarcely detect them.

The Government on its part took some measures to unearth the unassessed and *benami* lands and to obtain a comprehensive idea of the lands as the Permanent Settlement was in operation. As a matter of fact, Regulation 12 of 1817 which revived the Patwari Establishment (which lay in disuse following the completion of Ernst's *hastabud* in 1795) was designed for this purpose : to ascertain the quality, quantity and boundary of each plot; the extent of uncultivated and newly cultivated land; the *sadar jama*, *mofussil jama*, collections, arrears and other relevant matters. It was expected that while serving the interest of the ryots it would at once meet that of the Government by bringing to light the illegal possession of lands by the Zamindars. On June 10, 1820 Commissioner, Salmon directed Collector, Belli to make arrangement for the regular establishment of Patwari, headed by Canungoes, to furnish the Government with village accounts. Fourteen Canungoes were sanctioned for the district at an annual expenditure of Rs. 4,560.¹²⁵ An active co-operation of the Zamindars was

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Commr. to Collector, 31.7.1832

¹²⁵ BOR to Collr., 22.9.1820.

the precondition for successful working of the scheme. The Zamindars, however, tried their best to frustrate the plan. Considering the measure to be "against the usage of the district", they would neither bear the establishment expenses of the *patwaries* nor would allow their lands to be measured.¹²⁶ Big Zamindars like Bipracharan Chakravarty and Gurupiasad Bose were in the forefront and "the example spreads to the lower and smaller landed proprietors who mimic their superiors in all their contumacy".¹²⁷ When the Zamindars were forced under pain of fine to appoint the *patwaries* the Government learnt in dismay that most of them were "little better than mohurrers of the Zemindar . . ."¹²⁸ Forty-three petty talukdars [*Putnidars*?] joined in the service, who, without discharging their scheduled duties, "merely come to collect their rents from the ryots, and are off again . . ."¹²⁹ The *patwaries* had to suffer confinement for dereliction of duty.¹³⁰ But what more could those men do who were treated by the Zamindars "solely as their servants"? The *patwaries'* accounts were generally false, the result of manipulation both of the Zamindars and the farmers. They were obliged "simply to copy and attest with their signature such papers as they receive [from the Zamindars and farmers] and transmit counterparts to the Canoongoe".¹³¹ Papers concerning lands let in farm were of a similarly dubious nature. The actual extent of cultivation could not be ascertained through those papers. For instance, lands being cultivated by a ryot in different distant villages and paying a considerable rent for the whole were not included in the papers furnished by the gomasta of the farmers.¹³² The actual collection of a village was not shown either.

It is not the farmer's interest [the Collector wrote] to render true and faithful accounts, as if subject's at once the profits he enjoys from the lands and subject's him at the expiration of his lease to a higher jumma, if he is anxious to engage for a further term.¹³³

The accounts of cultivation of waste land were also thus carefully withheld and a transfer of land from one cultivator to another was

126 Garrett, Collr., to BOR, 13.2.1824.

127 *Ibid.*

128 Collr. to BOR, 13.6.1825.

129 Collr. to BOR, 13.2.1824.

130 Collr. to BOR, 17.5.1826.

131 Collr. to BOR, 13.6.1825.

132 *Ibid.*

kept concealed. Such being the state of affairs the Collector was perfectly right when he criticized the patwari establishment to be useless and observed that no Court of justice would accept the patwari papers as authentic documents.¹³⁴

5.5. *Resumption of rent-free lands by the Zamindars :*

The rent-free lands included in a mahal was another source of sustenance of the Zamindars. There were three kinds of rent in vogue in the district, namely, money rent, produce rent and labour rent. While the first and the second could easily be discernable and were subject to enhancement, the last one kept itself camouflaged under the term of baze zamin or rent-free tenures exclusively for the interests of the Zamindars. The rent-free land was granted for various forms of labour service by the grantee to the landlord. Grants were generally made to persons connected with administration and defence of the village, artisans and manufacturers, teachers and priests, some menial and subordinate staff etc. The origin of the system goes back to a distant past long before the advent of the Zamindari estates—when it was customary for the villagers to allot some uncultivated land as compensation for certain services received by the community¹³⁵. The service lands were commonly categorized under Ghatwali, thanadari, pykian, chakran and lakhiraj. From the Decennial Settlement a vast quantity of land measuring 73,955 bighas was exempt “in lieu of Government revenue assessable on the land for the service done to the State”¹³⁶. And the Zamindars subsequently resumed at the slightest opportunity a considerable portion of these lands within the jurisdiction of their respective estate.

Ghatwali lands : It was a peculiar kind of land tenure in vogue in the south-west and north-west quarter of the district, and the holders of such tenures had to guard the jungle and hill passes (ghats) against the incursion of foreign elements, particularly hill men, and “inroads of chowars and other Bandittee”¹³⁷. The ghatwals or defenders of passes were also required to take actions against “the untoward disposition of the Ryots”¹³⁸. In return they held land, half

133 *Ibid.*

134 Collr. to BOR 17.5.1826.

135 Ranajit Guha in his ‘Introduction’ to *West Bengal District Records : New Series. Burdwan (Letters issued 1788-1800)* p. LXV

136 Enclosure in the Collr’s letter to Commr. dated 13.2.1837.

137 Ag. Mge. to Secy. to the Judl. Deptt., 30.11.1813.

138 From same to same, 14.9.1813.

at a quit rent and the rest as rentfree jaghir¹³⁹. The lands were to a great extent sterile and jungly. In 1776 the Ghatwals were found to have held lands measuring 14,635 bighas with a jama of Rs 23,180-11¹⁴⁰. They held sanads on hereditary basis from the ruling authority specifying their duties and the amount of quit rent payable. They were a contented and peaceable set of people but their normal way of life was rudely disturbed by the developments in the Birbhum Zamindari since 1798/1799. The new purchasers of the ghatwali mahals "guided and prompted by their avarice alone", had indiscriminately enhanced the rent of all categories of land¹⁴¹. The old Ghatwal found himself threatened with "the merciless dispossession and oppressive spirit of his Zemindar". He produced his sanad in support of his hereditary possession of the land, his right to the fixed quit rent, "his responsibility for the lives, the property and general welfare of all the ryots in his jurisdiction and his exemption from the unjust demand", but to no avail. He was dispossessed of his land which was given in lease to another person at an increased rent¹⁴². This happened to the old Ghatwals of Tappeh Sarhet Deoghar, Tappeh Kundhir-Kuria, Tappeh Looni, and mahal Bis Hazari. Deprived of their "only source of existence"¹⁴³, many of them turned dacoits¹⁴⁴, and the dispossessed ghatwals of Sarhet-Deoghar had broken into an armed rebellion against the Zamindar and the Government in 1801¹⁴⁵ that lasted with varying degree of intensity until 1814¹⁴⁶.

Thanadari lands : By the early years of the nineteenth century most of the chakran lands had been resumed¹⁴⁷. Neither were spared the thanadari lands, lands held by the Chowkidars (village watchmen).

139 Collr to BOR, 18.11.1790.

140 Terei paper on the *Ghatwali Chowki* (outpost) in Birbhum for the year 1183 B.Y. (1776) enclosed in a letter from Mge. to S.P., 30.3.1814.

141 Mge to the Secy. to the Govt. in Judl. Deptt., 14.9.1813.

142 *Ibid.*

143 Ag. Mge. to Secy. to the Govt. in Judl. Deptt., 7.9.1813.

144 S.P., Lower Provinces, to the Secy., to the Govt. in Judl. Deptt. 12.6.1812.

145 Mge. to the Secy. to the Govt. in Judl. Deptt., 30.5.1803.

146 Capt Sherwill : *Geographical and Statistical Report of the District of Beerbhoom*, p. 8. For further details about the Ghatwal Revolt see Ranjan Gupta, 'The Aboriginal world of Birbhum : From the Ghatwal Revolt to the Santal Insurrection of 1855-56, in *Bengal Past and Present* (Calcutta), Vol. xciii, Parts II, III, No. 176, 177, pp. 137-142.

147 Collr. to BOR, 30.3.1802.

The Chowkidars formed a vast multitude in the pre-Permanent Settlement era when the responsibility of maintaining law and order in the district rested with the Birbhum *Raj*. In addition to performing their normal police duty, "it is the more immediate duty of a large portion of them to collect the revenues and serve as guides and coolies".¹⁴⁸ After the Permanent Settlement the Zamindar was relieved of this responsibility and the new Zamindars did not lose much time in resuming a good portion of the assigned lands.¹⁴⁹ The process accelerated with the rising price of lands. Naturally it was an easy conquest, as the village watchmen were an illiterate and a very poor group. They formed quite a numerous group too. As late as 1840 they numbered 13,484, "each watchman having charge of from 25 to 30 houses".¹⁵⁰ Total lands assigned to village watchmen and ghat *chowkidars* were estimated in 1837 at bigha 1,26,493-13¹⁵¹. In 1822 lands granted to the village *chowkidars* alone amounted to 1,27,836 bighas.¹⁵² Most of the *Chowkidars* received in lieu of their services ("which if properly executed are certainly more onerous than most other employment", as a Magistrate observed in 1832) from one to ten *bighas* or a bit more land which in most cases were of high *kankar* land requiring small embankments constantly looked after in order to retain the rain water and when the rain failed to be artificially irrigated.¹⁵³ A good number of them, the ghat *chowkidars* especially, had to work at a paltry salary of "8 as, 10 as or one Rupee" per annum,¹⁵⁴ and this at a time when rice sold at the rate of one and a half maund per rupee.¹⁵⁵ Blunt, the Magistrate, reported in 1810 that many *chowkidars* deprived of their *chakran* lands "through the rapacity of the Zemindars", and driven to desperation, had taken recourse to robbery to earn their subsistence.¹⁵⁶ Cardew, another Magistrate, corroborated the statement in 1832 by stating that there

148 Mge. to S.P., 8.1.1816.

149 Mge. to the Judges of the Provincial Court of Circuit, 29.7.1808; Mge. to S.P., 8.1.1816.

150 Asstt. Mge. to Offg. S.P., 9.2.1840.

151 Statement forwarded by the Offg. Mge. to S.P., showing the number and designation of different classes of persons holding police lands in Birbhum, undated, most probably of 1837.

152 B. B. Mukherjee, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement operations in the District of Birbhum*, p. 115.

153 Mge. to Commr., 3.7.1832.

154 Offg. Mge. to Sessions Judge of Birbhum, 11.7.1837; Offg. Mge. to S.P., 9.2.1840.

155 Offg. Mge. to Offg. Commr. of Revenue in Circuit, 15.4.1835.

156 Mge. to Secy. to the Govt. in Judicial Deptt., 21.4.1810.

was "scarcely a crime in this district in which one or more chowkeedars are not engaged ..."¹⁵⁷

Lakhiraj tenures : The lakhirajdars (holders of rent-free tenures) did not fare better.

It is a general custom [a Collector reported in 1853] for the new purchaser of an estate, immediately after obtaining possession, to come down upon the Holder of all Rent-free tenures, with notices to prove their right to hold their land without paying rent.¹⁵⁸

In many cases the lakhirajdars, under difficult circumstances, were unable to produce documentary evidence in support of their rightful possession. In numerous cases they could produce sanads granted before the commencement of the Permanent Settlement, but the new purchasers questioned their validity.¹⁵⁹ "The consequences is that they are summarily ousted", and the army of dispossessed peasants had swelled by new recruits.

In this connection the Government's treatment of the lakhiraj tenures may be touched upon. In view of the inelastic nature of the land revenue under the Permanent Settlement the Government seems to have been in search of some other sources of revenue. To this end the Resumption Regulations (Reg II of 1819 and Reg III of 1828) were promulgated and enforced, and since 1835 operations under them were carried out throughout the district. In 1836 there were 5,563 rent-free tenures, ranging from below 100 bighas to above 500 bighas, totalling 1,17,360 bighas of land.¹⁶⁰ Within two years

157 Mge. to Commr., 3.7.1832.

158 Offg. Collr. to Commr., 21.5.1853.

159 W. H. Belli, Offg. Collr., to Secy. to the BOR, 9.8.1820.

160 Barwell, Collr., to Watters, Commr., 16.5.1836.

The break-up of the mahals is as follows :

No. of rent free tenures under 100 bighas		No. of rent free tenures above 100 & below 500 bighas		No. of rent free tenures above 500 bighas		Total number of tenures and bighas	
5,416		134		13		5,563	
Bighas	Cott.	B.		B.	C.	B.	C.
73,880	8	25,644		17,835	19	1,17,360	9

of the operation of the Resumption Regulations, 5,001 cases were instituted for resumption of the lakhiraj tenures¹⁶¹ and by 1838/1839 the Government had gained an annual revenue of Rs 34,005 from this source.¹⁶² The settlement of resumed lakhiraj land had two major shortcomings : the inaccurate measurement made by the colluding amins (surveyor) and the "too high assessment".¹⁶³ Pending the realization of assessment the lakhirajdars were levied a standard rent of one rupee per bigha.¹⁶⁴ The rate was admittedly oppressive to the lakhirajdars who had so long been enjoying rent-free tenures. It was heavier still than that assessed on the resumed thanadari land.¹⁶⁵ Collector Stainforth in 1838 recommended writing off of about half the arrears, as the assessment was too exorbitant to be legitimate.¹⁶⁶ The realization of the other half would not be easy either. Because the defaulters had "either absconded or hidden their property".¹⁶⁷

5.6. *Legal and illegal exactions from the ryots :*

In their frantic search for means to survive and prosper, the Zamindars naturally turned to the ryots with whom they were directly concerned. An illiterate and humble multitude, the ryots were completely ignorant of the legal and administrative intricacies. This gave the Zamindars an excellent opportunity to utilize, by means fair and foul, the laws and regulations of the Company. Regulation VII of 1799 made it permissible for the Zamindars to distrain the property of the tenants for actual or pretended arrears of rent. There was also provisions for appeal to the Civil Court against unjust distress or sale of property. The ryots being unable to make use of the provision, the Regulation, for all practical purposes, gave the Zamindars a free hand to attach and dispose of the goods and chattels of the ryots. Regulation V of 1812 revised the existing rules respecting

161 Collr. to Commr., 27.2.1837.

162 Sadar Board of Revenue : Settlement copies of correspondence between the Government, the Board, the Commissioners on settlement operation reports, Murshidabad Divn. From E. Currie, Secy., Sadar Board of Revenue, to Halliday, Secy. to the Govt of Bengal, 22.1.1840, p. 180. BRR.

163 Offg. Collr. to Commr., 28.5.1838.

164 Collr. to Commr., 20.11.1838.

165 Ag. Collr. in his letter to the Commr. dated 25.9.1834 informed that 7,263 bighas 13 Cottas of resumed thanadari lands (3,122 bighas 10 cottahs being recorded uncultivated) were settled in 1795 at Rs. 2,344-15 or at the rate of annas 5 and 3 gundas per bigha.

166 Ag. Collr. to Commr., 28.5.1838.

167 *Ibid.*

pattas and other engagements as well as respecting attachment and other summary modes. Section 13 of Regulation V of 1812, for instance, prescribed written demand to be served on the defaulter. But, as Collector Reid admitted, seldom did the Zamindar follow the procedure and effected attachment of the ryot's property "as he pleases ...".¹⁶⁸ In very many cases they did not deem it worthwhile to go through the process of attachment at all. Knowing very precisely the quantity of grain and other property the defaulter possessed, the distrainer more often than not appeared before the Commissioner with all the inventory and necessary documents. He would represent that the demand had been legally made and the property attached by him some days ago, and now a formal order to sell the property was required. But in fact, "the first information that the unfortunate ryot gains of the attachment is the arrival of the *Ishtihar* [notice] from the Commissioner to sell the goods and chattels".¹⁶⁹ The ryot got redress neither from the Commissioner nor the Collector, who might be "susceptible of influence either by fear or corruption of the stronger party".¹⁷⁰ And the Government officials would not deny that "the distrainer certainly as a general rule being more worthy of credit than the defaulter".¹⁷¹ Although it was binding under the provisions of the Permanent Settlement for a Zamindar to issue patta to the ryot specifying the quantity of land under his plough, and the amount of his rent, it was respected more in breach than in observance. W. N. Garrett, the Collector, informed the Board of Revenue in his correspondence dated December 22, 1824, that only in few cases were the ryots favoured with pattas, and "such is the way of proceeding amongst the Zemindars of this part of the country".¹⁷² How far could a patta influence relationship between an all-powerful proprietor and an humble peasant who was at once poor, illiterate and ignorant of his right enjoined in a written contract? But the Zamindars would not suffer even the shadow of any restraint. Regulation VIII of 1793 forbade landlords to levy imposts or to take more than the amount specified in the *Kabuliats*. And this, too, was respected more in breach than in observance. The practices of over assessment and excess collection of rent, imposition of new *abwabs* in violation of law, eviction, arson and physical torture became the

168 Collr. to Commr., 16.8.1847.

169 *Ibid.*

170 *Ibid.*

171 *Ibid.*

172 Collr. to Secy., BOR, 22.12.1824.

rule of the day. As late as 1853 the Collector reported "almost complete desertion" of a mahal named Deepchandrapur as a result of over-assessment and extortion of the proprietor.¹⁷³ The constant change of proprietor of a mahal was a very potent cause of the distress of the ryots.¹⁷⁴ The tenants under new masters were to pay rent anew, even if it was paid twice or thrice before. The Collector noted that sometimes a Zamindar in apprehension of his loss of estate "collects his rents from his tenants for one or two years previous to their becoming due ..."¹⁷⁵ In 1821, as many as 13 *azwabs* were collected from the ryots.¹⁷⁶ No legal proceedings was instituted on that score. The Government stood an disinterested onlooker, and "the ryots do not consider it advisable to prosecute the Zemindar in the Court on that ground".¹⁷⁷ The short-weight currency was another evil that plagued the district. In 1818 the Collector reported that most of the currencies in circulation in the district were of that category.¹⁷⁸ Naturally it could cause inconvenience to sadar malguzars [Zamindars] (as it did to all sections of people) in paying revenue to the treasury. But they were clever enough to make it

a source of emoluments to them as the malgoozars throughout the whole of the district are in general in the habit of exacting a percentage of one pice batta on every Rupee which the ryot pays in for rent ... [and] the hardship experienced by the ryots is very considerable.¹⁷⁹

Change of currency and insufficient supply of coins equally affected the ryots. Early in 1838 both the Company's rupee and the sicca rupee were in circulation at a batta—one anna for the former and half anna for the latter.¹⁸⁰ The Collector observed: "... any

173 Collr. to Commr., 21.5.1853.

174 Collr. to Commr., 17.10.1829.

175 *Ibid.*

176 Ag. Collr. to Secy., BOR, 11.6.1821.

Belli, in his above letter listed the occasions on which the cesses (*selami*) were levied by the Zamindar on the ryots: "(1) pujas of trees, (2) certain ceremonies for the dead, (3) digging new tanks, (4) marriage of the ryots, (5) marriage of a child of the Zemindar, (6) any death occurring in the family of the Zamindar, (7) the *Dasara Puja*, (8) the first introduction of the grain, (9) *tola selami* at fairs (10) *selami* from all fishermen within their estates, (11) *Kayali selami*, (12) *Biksha* (begging) *selami*, (13) *Patta selami*."

177 *Ibid.*

178 Asstt. Collr. of Birbhum to Collr. of Murshidabad, 7.5.1818.

179 *Ibid.*

180 Offg. Collr. to Commr., 13.2.1838.

change of this nature [change from old to new currency] operates against the most ignorant, and the Zemindars and muhajuns are the gainers ..."¹⁸¹

5.7. *Thieves and robbers to enrich the Zamindars:*

Many of the Zamindars had another source of strength : the robbers residing in their estates. In 1844 Lautour, the officiating Joint Magistrate of the district, wrote that the Zamindars and Talukdars, "with very few exceptions", not only provided thieves and dacoits with shelters but brought them in their regular pay.¹⁸² The payment, made monthly through the thangidar (receiver of stolen property), varied from one hundred to two hundred rupees a month, according to the strength of the gang. The *modus operandi* was as follows : when a dacoity took place the valuable property was immediately carried off to the thangidars who again passed it on to the talukdars or Zamindars. The Zamindar retained twelve annas in the rupee giving four annas to the thangidars, while "the Dacoits have to comfort themselves with pots and pans and the protection of the Zemindars".¹⁸³ In another letter the Magistrate detected in the chain some of the "Tjaradars and other under leaseholders ... of which there are a great many in this district ..."¹⁸⁴ Earlier in 1810, Blunt, the Magistrate, came to the same conclusion as he investigated the ways and means of more than two hundred proprietors of the district who had "rapidly risen from penury to affluence".¹⁸⁵ The Magistrate observed that in league with the decoits

"the Mundals have in the last six or eight years become sudder farmers, and sudder farmers wealthy Zemindars; whilst almost without exception, the sirdar Dacoits, at whose risks they have risen to affluence, after the most successful career for many years, end their lives on the gallows, leaving their families destitute."¹⁸⁶

Further he observed,

"Many wealthy proprietors of estates, now occupy large pukka houses, who a few years back were employed as Pykars,

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² E. F. Lautour, Offg. Jt. Mge., to S.P., 13.5.1844.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Jt. Mge. to S.P., 17.1.1844.

¹⁸⁵ Mge. to Secy. to the Govt. in Judicial Deptt., 15.8.1810.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

and gomasthas, on a salary of five or six rupees per month; the sole property of others, consisted in a small retail shop in some one of the principal towns, in this or the neighbouring districts ... They were the patrons either of the dacoits or of the thangidars. The Magistrate noted that,

the great body of the people are entirely subject to their influence and power; that it is the first object of every Zemindar to establish an interest with the police and sudder officers; and that they keep agents both at the Thanah and the Magistrate's cutcherry, to afford them early notice of the orders and proceedings of those authorities, to counteract their operation, when adverse to their interests.¹⁸⁷

6. *The New Zamindars:*

6.1. *A Case Study:*

Our characterization of the new Zamindars would be amply illustrated by a case study of a Zamindar family, the famous house of Hetampur which rose from obscure origins to the status of becoming the most powerful Zamindar of Birbhum.

The House of Hetampur Raj:

It was the latter half of the seventeenth century. Muralidhar Chakravarty, an ancestor of the Hetampur Raj family, emigrated from his original home in Bankura to Birbhum. Was it poverty or the family feud that drove him from his home? Whatever the reason, Muralidhar came to Rajnagar, the seat of the Muslim Zamindar, with no provision of his own, and is said to have accepted a menial job under the Nagar Raj. He ended his precarious existence at quite an old age and was survived by his two sons—Chaitanya Charan and Prasad. Chaitanya Charan was brought to Hetampur by Hafez Khan, the fouzdar of the Hetampur fort, some fifteen miles south-east of Rajnagar. Since then the Chakravarty family was a permanent resident of the aforesaid village. Chaitanya Charan died a very poor Brahmin leaving "Dadhibamana, the family deity and a tree as his assets".¹⁸⁸ The helpless widow with her two little sons,

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Maharajkumar Mahima Nirnanjan Chakravarty ed. : *Birbhum Bibaran*, (hereafter cited as Chakravarty : *Birbhum*). Vol. I (Hetampur, 1323 B.Y. 1917 A.D.) p. 44. The Editor is a descendant of the Hetampur House

Radhanath and Kuchil, fell into abymal penury and privation. She had to take recourse to "manual labour" for their bare maintenance.¹⁸⁹

Radhanath Chakravarty :

But fortune soon smiled on the wretched family, thanks to extraordinary dash, zeal and cunning of Radhanath. Radhanath Chakravarty (b. 1762) was the founder of the Hetampur Raj and a true representative of the new Zamindars of the post-Permanent Settlement period. Having acquired a smattering of education (he just entered the village pathshala, i.e. the elementary school), Radhanath started his career as a cook.¹⁹⁰ However, he was fortunate enough to have the kindly support of the Roy family, then at the height of their influence at Hetampur because of their connection with the Birbhum Raj as *gomasta* and *Ijaradar* (lease-holder).¹⁹¹ Radhanath served under Neelambar Roy and Magharam Roy as *Gomasta* (1777-1780), a situation he made most of. In 1780 he had taken to revenue farming. With the rapid disintegration and decline of Birbhum Raj, the Roy family suffered eclipse and Radhanath's fortunes began to rise. From 1781 to 1799 (1187-1205 B.Y.) he undertook *ijara* of as many as 17 mouzas of the Birbhum Raj, some of them *benami* (under fraudulent name).¹⁹² He had also worked as a *Tahsildar* (rent collector) and a *Croak Sezwal* (attachment official) under the Raja. Kuchil, his brother, also assisted him. The money he earned through those assignments made him ambitious to become a Zamindar. Chance soon came for fulfilment of this ambition. At that time different *mahals* of the Birbhum Zamindari were being advertised for sale. When most of the people hesitated to purchase them out of fear of the *Raja*, Radhanath rushed. In 1798 he purchased three *lats* (Dhuanya, Junidpur and Halsinagar) by auction. This was his first venture. He steadily followed the practice. The Chronicler of the Hetampur Raj house records that the Nagar Raj got angry with him for his audacity to purchase *lats* at auction sale and dispatched *paiks* to imprison him.¹⁹³ On the otherhand the descendants of the Nagar Raj allege that Radhanath, as rent Collector, misappropriated the collected money and caused auction sale of certain *mahals*, the *sadar*

189 *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

190 E. F. Lautour, *Offg. Jt. Mge. to Dampier*, S.P., 28.2.1844.

191 Chakravarty : *Birbhum*, I, p. 45.

192 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

193 *Ibid.*

jama of which he wilfully withheld and eventually purchased them. Whatever the methods, Radhanath and Kuchil, whose savings amounted to Rs 3,300 only in 1797 had procured by 1803 a landed property worth Rs. 15,667-8, an eleven ahna share of which went to Radhanath on a partition suit.¹⁹⁴ Radhanath in 1810 acted as an attachment *amin* of the Government and visited Rajnagar to seize the movable property of the Raja in a vindictive mood. Facing a violent opposition from the paiks of the palace, he asked for police help from the Collector of Murshidabad. However, he soon became rich and powerful enough to relinquish his post. The prestige of Radhanath was further enhanced as he brought the Roy family, once his master, and his uhle, on his pay-roll. When in 1836 Radhanath died, the net annual income of his property was more than Rs 20,000.¹⁹⁵

Bipracharan Chakravarty :

Bipracharan Chakravarty, the surviving son of Radhanath Chakravarty, was the most illustrious Zamindar of the Hetampur House. Unscrupulous to the bone, he excelled his father in ambition, enterprise and ingenuity. Within seven years of his father's death, Bipracharan made his Zamindari the largest one in the district.¹⁹⁶ Data are not available to make a full computation of his landed and other interests, as he enjoyed benami possession of many mahals. In this connection it may be mentioned that as early as September, 1836, he put up landed property worth more than one and a half lakh of rupees as securities for a number of native officers serving in the Collectorate of Birbhum.¹⁹⁷ Nothing he considered unfair in increasing his property and exalting position. From 1837/1838 to 1842/1843 he was the Dewan of Rajnagar estate¹⁹⁸ from which he derived whatever benefits that old and decayed Zamindari could allow. It is on official record dated November 12, 1849, that Bipracharan ejected a Sardar Chowkidar of Dubrajpur from 93 bighas of land and kept "undisputed possession for 3 years" and showed "the audacity to appeal against the order for its restoration".¹⁹⁹ He, like his father,

194 *Op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

195 *Op. cit.*, pp. 49-50

196 Offg. Jt Mge to SP, 19.2.1844.

197 Collr's Annual report on revised securities of native officers entrusted with the charge of public money and other property under Collectorate of Birbhum for 1836, dated 16.7.1836.

198 Chakravarty : *Birbhum*, I, 51.

199 Office memorandum of the Magistrate, 12.11.1849.

was a money-lender, too. Very little is known about his private money-lending business but it is notable that he lent Rs. 50,000 to *Bibi Rajibunnisa* of Rajnagar Raj family and took *benami* possession of Tappeh Muhammadabad paying an additional amount of Rs. 35,000.²⁰⁰ He soon managed to get hold of certain parts of the Zamindari title of *Tappeh Shahallumpur*.²⁰¹

Bipracharan wove a clandestine but an effective net-work of influence and manipulation with the help of the important officials of the Judge's Court, the Collectorate, and the Magistrate's office at the Sadar and those at the thana level. Dunbar, the District Magistrate, held him in great affection for his "high ability" even in his early youth, and in June, 1819, at the time of his leaving the district made this young native a gift of the great Botanical Garden (Bara Bagan) and the "Red Villa" (Lal Kuthi) at Suri as a token of his tender feelings.²⁰² Kashinath Roy, the treasurer of the Collectorate, was his own man for whom he stood surety. He also pledged security for the Nazir of the Collectorate,²⁰³ the stamp daroga Brajamohan Sen, the acting abkari daroga Lala Rasik Lal, Nilkanta Chakravarty, Tahsildar at Sarhet, most of the stamp vendors of the district and a host of others.²⁰⁴ The stamp vendors although petty persons selling stamp papers at commission—only one per cent at the sadar and 3 per cent in the mofussil, on the volume of sale,²⁰⁵ held a more important position than their humble rank would warrant. They could disrupt, even if for a short period, the normal working of the revenue and judicial departments by creating artificial scarcity of stamp papers in the market. The stamp vendors "almost all", indeed, were "in the service of Zemindars and other landed proprietors in the capacity of Mookhtears or agents".²⁰⁶

Kaliprasad Mukherjee, the Sherishtadar of the Criminal Court:

But the man who played the pivotal role in the game was Kaliprasad Mukherjee, the Sherishtadar of the Criminal Court. A man

200 Chakravarty : *Birbhum*, I, p. 52.

201 *Op. cit.*

202 *Op. cit.* p. 51.

203 Collr. to Commr. of Revenue, 25.2.1830.

204 Collr's annual report of revised securities of native officers under Collectorate of Birbhum under the signature of A. C. Barwell, dated 16.7.1836

205 Ag. Collr. to the Secy. to the BOR, 2.5.1823.

206 *Ibid.*

of obscure origin, Kaliprasad held an inferior office in the district Criminal Court from 1808 (1809?) to 1826, and was nominated as Sheristadar in 1827.²⁰⁷ Bipracharan gave his two daughters in marriage with two sons of Kaliprasad, Kuladananda and Tarakananda, who were appointed, under the influence of the father-in-law, the Munsiff (later sub-judge) and Inspector of police, respectively.²⁰⁸ Holding a key office Kaliprasad wielded enormous power in the Criminal Court. Once it appeared that he also impressed the District Magistrates. Magistrate Sainforth in appreciation of his "efficiency" recommended his name for a post of Munsiff in April, 1838.²⁰⁹ In January 1839 his successor, Atherton spoke highly of the "ability and integrity" of the sherishtadar while forwarding his petition for a post of Assistant Magistrate.²¹⁰ But five years later a completely different picture emerged. Whitmore, the Magistrate, unearthed a secret league formed, among other persons, of the amlas of the Criminal Court and the Police administration.²¹¹ The league consisted mainly of his Sherishtadar and Peshkar, who were cousins, and the muktear of the Burdwan Raj, Ramsundar Roy.

They again [the Magistrate reported to the Superintendent of Police] represent Bipperchurn Chakrabortee, the largest Zemindar of the District, the Sheristadar's son marrying a daughter of Chakrabortee.²¹²

The Magistrate admitted that the Sherishtadar and the Peshkar were clever men. "They have had a (sic) [great?] deal of confidence placed in them and like all natives have abused it ..." All the appointments in the thanas were controlled by the sheristadar. He would receive bribe and selami (respect money) from the new recruits and selami from all the thanas of the district at the beginning of the year.²¹³ Ramsundar Roy would get four annas in the rupee. The rate of selami for each recruit was as follows :

Barkandaz	Rs. 40
Jamadar	Rs. 100
Daroga	Rs. 200-300
Muharer	Rs. 200-300

207 Mge.'s statement about the nomination of vacant offices in the Criminal Court of Zillah Birbhum, dated 8.8.1829.

208 Chakravarty : *Birbhum*, I, p. 52.

209 Stanforth, Mge., to F. C. Forth, S.P., 9.4.1838.

210 Mge. to S.P., 30.1.1839.

211 From same to same, 19.2.1844.

212 *Ibid.*

The Magistrate frankly confessed that "all the Darogahs or the greater part of them are creatures of the Magistrate's Serishtadar and many of them are not fit for their appointment".²¹⁴ He saw no chance of bringing dacoity in the district under control without a whole-sale transfer of amlas of the Criminal Court to other districts.

Ramsundar Roy, the Muktear of the Burdwan Raj:

In course of time Ramsundar, Bipracharan, and Kaliprasad still further entrenched their position in the district administration. They became, for all practical purposes, the most influential force at the Sadar. Of the trio Ramsundar Roy, the Muktear of the Burdwan Raj, was an immensely powerful man at the fouzdari Court who was "one with Bipperchuran".²¹⁵ He was standing a trial for embezzlement of Rs 1,10,428-12-6, but this could impair neither his power nor prestige.²¹⁶ He was an extremely dreaded man and "no one is ... allowed to come into the Magistrate Court without his permission".²¹⁷ The Magistrate wrote that he was all powerful in the Court,

... all mooktears being obliged to make their salam [respects] to him twice a day under the pain of displeasure and plaintiffs and defendants never being allowed to come near my Court without going to him and all cases coming into my court depended entirely on his will and pleasure.²¹⁸

This assorted group could wreak vengeance on any of its adversaries. Thanks to its manipulation the Record Keeper and the Nazir, for example, were suspended from their posts for their alleged supplying the Magistrate with information against them. But the victims could not expect any redress in the law court of the district against the evildoers. The Magistrate admitted it : "for in Soory there is not a man who dare speak his mind freely if it is contrary to that of Ramsundar Roy and Bipperchurn Chakorbuty ..."²¹⁹ It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the Magistrate in November, 1849, listed him among one of the three most notorious Zamindars of the district, "a great oppressor" of the ryots.²²⁰

213 *Ibid.*

214 *Ibid.*

215 Off. Jt. Mge. to S.P., 28.2.1844.

216 *Ibid.*

217 Same to Same, 19.2.1844.

218 Same to same, 28.2.1844.

219 *Ibid.*

220 Office Memorandum of the Magistrate, 12.11.1849.

This "great oppressor" and the notorious Zamindar, however, had not to wait for long for his good name to be restored and the official favour resumed by his loyal and energetic services to the Government. Lord William Bentinck once said :

If security was wanting against extensive tumult or revolution, I should say that the Permanent Settlement, though a failure in many other respects and in most important essentials, has this great advantage at least, of having created a vast body of rich landed proprietors deeply interested in the continuance of the British Dominion and having complete command over the mass of the people.²²¹

The speech is fully vindicated during the Santal Rebellion of Birbhum in 1855/1856. Bipracharan himself a contributory factor to the Rebellion (he had extensive Zamindari in the Santal Parganas where he earned notoreity as an oppressive Zamindar) and one of the worst-affected landlords, helped the Government actively with men, money and provisions. He raised "a force at his own expense, from among his dependents to aid the military force in the suppression of the Sonthal insurrection."²²² The Government heartily appreciated "the public spirit" he thus evinced.²²³ The next generations faithfully followed the loyal tradition. In 1875 Northbrook conferred on Ram Ranjan, grandson of Bipracharan, the title of "Raja" and two years later he was honoured with the title of "Raja Bahadur" by Lord Lytton. In 1912 the Government was pleased to elevate him to the rank of "Maha Raja", a great honour and distinction for a Zamindar.

221 Quoted from R. P. Dutta : *India Today* (Bombay, 1949) p. 218.

222 A. H. Ruper, Under Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, to I. Richardson, Collr., dated 2.10.1855.

223 Chakravarty : *Birbhum*, I, 55.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

[This article is a slightly revised version of a Chapter of my unpublished doctoral dissertation. 'The Economic Life of a Bengal District : Birbhum, 1793-1857', (Calcutta University, 1976) I am grateful to my supervisor, Professor Binay Bhusan Chaudhuri of Calcutta University. Thanks are due to Professor Ashin Das Gupta (Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan), Professor Amartya Sen (Nuffield College, Oxford), Professor Amiya Kumar Bagchi (Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta) for their helpful comments. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Dr. Satchidananda Mukherjee, Head, Department of Sanskrit (since retired), Suri Vidyasagar College, for his constant encouragement towards completion of the work which took more than twelve years. I would like here to mention that some fellows and scholars of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, and some teachers of the Calcutta University, Burdwan University and Visva Bharati University were kind enough to go through the thesis after I was admitted to the Ph.D. degree.

If not otherwise mentioned, the records referred to are preserved at the Birbhum Collectorate Archives, Suri, Birbhum (West Bengal).

ABBREVIATIONS

Collr. = Collector; Mge = Magistrate; Commr. = Commissioner of Revenue; Commr. : Birbhum = Commissioner in-charge of Birbhum Zamin-dari; S.P. = Superintendent of Police; Ag. = Acting; Offg. = Officiating; Jt. = Joint; BRR = West Bengal Secretariat Record Room, Calcutta; DJC = Dist. Judge's Court Archives; BOR = Board of Revenue; Judl. Deptt. = Judicial Department; COD = Court of Directors; G.G. in Council = Governor-general in Council.

STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM :
ACTIVITIES OF DACCA ANUSHILAN SAMITI IN BIHAR
N. M. P. SRIVASTAV

The Dacca Anushilan Samiti founded, originally by Pulin Behari Das in 1905, was a most powerful revolutionary organisation. It aimed at the complete overthrow of government, the expulsion of the English and establishment of independence and that as the means to these ends it countenanced the commission of dacoities and murder.¹

The *Samiti* made strong appeal to patriotism by depicting the English as selfish, oppressive and bent on ruining India for their own enrichment and aggrandisement. The backwardness of the country, the ignorance and poverty of the masses, the prevalence of plague and cholera, were all attributed to British rule and complete independence was held up as the only means of salvation.

In the words of *Sedition Committee Report*, "while its organisation was most compact in Mymensingh and Dacca, it was active from Dinajpur in the North-West to Chittagong in the South-east and from Cooch Behar on the north-east to Midnapore on the south-west. Outside Bengal, we find its members working in Assam, Bihar, the Punjab, the United Provinces, the Central Provinces and at Poona."²

There is ample evidence on record that the *Dacca Anushilan Samiti* established a Central organisation for Bihar at Bhagalpur in 1915 which was known as the Divisional headquarters. Its main object was to spread the cult of revolution among Bihari students who were considered to be diffident, timid, educationally backward and unaroused by wave of political discontent. Bihari youths were to be recruited for party work when they found suitable. It also aimed at establishing retreats for absconders who found Bengal too hot for them.³

1 Political (Special) Government of Bihar and Orissa (hereafter referred to as G.B.O.), File no. 36 of 1918.

2 *Sedition Committee Report*, Calcutta, 1918, p. 105.

3 Report on *Dacca Anushilan Samiti in Bihar* by E. L. Marriott, Special Assistant to Deputy Inspector General of Police, Crime and Railways, Government of Bihar and Orissa. The report was submitted to the Rowlatt Committee at Calcutta for discussion on February 7, 1918.

Although Phani Bhushan Bhattacharji was the first emissary of the *Dacca Anushilan Samiti* in Bihar, he did not play important role in furthering the cause of revolution. It was left to Rebati Mohan Nag to develop revolutionary activities throughout the Province. Phani Bhushan Bhattacharji came to Bhagalpur in July 1915 from Berhampur College and got admission into the Tej Narayan Jubilee College (now T.N.B. College). He recruited only one local student, Phani Bhushan Singh. Just after his arrival, *Samiti* sent Rebati Mohan Nag (alias Practical, alias Kanai Bansi, K.B.) to Bhagalpur for establishing a brnch of society. He was an inhabitant of Tipperah district and a student of Berhampur College. He took admission in the I.A. class of T.N.J. College.

Rebati became the Divisional Manager of the Bhagalpur Division of the *Samiti* and extended the branches of the *Samiti* to Gaya, Purnea, Monghyr, Patna, Muzaffarpur, Chapra, Arrah, Darbhanga and Champaran.⁴ He was financed by Jogendra Bhattacharji (alias Rasik Lal Ray alias Jyoti) who lived at 39 Pathuriaghatta Street, Calcutta, at one time *Samiti*'s headquarters.

Subsequently the branch of Jatin Mukherji's party amalgamated⁵ with the *Dacca Anushilan Samiti* at Bhagalpur with a view to accelerate the pace of revolution. Priya Nath Bhattacharya (alias Bihari da) of *Banaras Conspiracy Case* also came to Bhagalpur to join the *Samiti* in July 1916. He had been advised by Pareshe da (alias Amrit Sarkar) that if he could work well in Bihar he might get leadership for Bihar, U.P., Punjab and Rajputana independent of Bengal. So, he set out for Bhagalpur after informing Rebati to wait for him at Railway station.⁶ Two other emissaries of the *Samiti*, Nalini Bagchi (alias Publisher) of Murshidabad and Anath Bandhu (alias LMS) of Birbhum district also joined the T. N. J. College while another emissary Hari Mohan Jha could not succeed in getting admission. Nalini Kanta Ghosh (alias Chasma) and Mohini Bhattacharji (alias Arun Datta alias Manu alias Bankim or Bankim Da) also came to Bhagalpur to join the *Samiti*.

After taking charge of Divisional headquarters at Bhagalpur Rebati established retreats for absconders, set up post boxes and

4 *Ibid.*

5 Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 123 of 1919

6 Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 242 of 1918.

organised different revolutionary groups although each group was connected with each other. T. N. J. College, Marwari Pathshala and many other institutions were the centre of revolutionary propaganda. The members of the *Samiti* tried to recruit students, explained aims and objects of the *Samiti*, and instilled patriotism into their minds paving the way for revolt against the English at earliest opportunity.

Rebati hired Gopilal's house at Jogsar, Bhagalpur, to use it as retreat for absconders. The principal rendezvous of the *Samiti* was on the bank of Ganga near the Burhanath temple where Rebati and his friends used to meet the local students to train them in revolutionary techniques.⁷ They initiated a number of local students as members and distributed *liberty leaflets*, *works of Vivekanand* and a well known book *Desher Ko'ha*, which were recognised media for revolutionary propaganda. A government report says, "It is by no means an exaggeration to say that at present the older schoolboys and the college students in the province live in an atmosphere of vicious political discontent as a result of their appetite for the writings and speeches of the more virulent public agitators and it is this that had enabled revolutionary emissaries to make such headway in educational centres."⁸

In October 1916, the Bengal Intelligence Branch sent an officer to arrest Rebati on getting information of his activities in Bhagalpur. The party got wind of this action which led Rebati and Anath Bandhu Ghosh to disappear on October 18, 1918.

From certain cypher papers recovered in Bengal the names of three *Samiti* post boxes in Bhagalpur were discovered. They were Rash Behari Lal (alias political), Chakradhar Prasad and Chun Chun Prasad Pandey (alias K no. 1)⁹. Consequently, they were arrested along with many other *Samiti* members from different part of the province. Their statement revealed the activities of the *Samiti*. All the deponents were students or school boys studying in schools or colleges in Bihar who had been prevailed on to join the party by the

7 Political (Special). G.B.O., File no. 36 of 1918.

8 Special Assistant to Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Crime and Railways, to Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar and Orissa, May 7, 1918.

9 Note on persons dealt with under Defence of India (Consolidation) Rules in Bhagalpur and Gaya District. This report had been submitted before the Rowlatt Committee by the officials of the government of Bihar and Orissa for discussion on February 7, 1918.

emissaries sent from Bengal with the express object of obtaining recruits.

Rash Behari Lal was a student of I.Sc. at the T. N. J. College and was living under the guardianship of his uncle Brij Behari Lal at Purani Sarai, Nathnagar. In a statement to the Police, he admitted close intimacy with Rebati Mohan Nag and other dangerous obsconders from Bengal who were hiding in Bhagalpur and recruiting members from among the students. He also admitted being given inflammatory literature (such as the works of Vivekananda) to read by Rebati to whom he gave the names of certain Biharis and domiciled Bengalis whom he considered might be won over to the revolutionary cause.¹⁰

In a statement made on March 29, 1917, Rash Behari Lal said, "Rebati frequently talked about the Motherland and told us that we (meaning Biharis) are doing nothing for the sake of Motherland and exhorted me to emulate the students of Bengal. He frequently told me that there is no strong public opinion in Bihar and there are no political leaders. He always told me that we should always be ready to lay down our lives for the sake of mother India. He told me that the Bengalis committed dacoities not for personal gains but for the welfare of the country. He always advised me to read the accounts of dacoities, political arrests, outrages and house searches and to think over the matter. In short, he told me that we Biharis should do the same work as is done by the anarchists in Bengal. He pointed out that it is not possible for Bengalis to work in Bihar. They (Bengalis) can only educate and instruct the Biharis. Rebati Nag talked the above subjects when we were alone. He expressly instructed me not to broach upon the matters in presence of anybody."¹¹

In another statement made on July 10 and 11, 1917, Rash Behari Lal said, "He (Rebati Nag) often advised me to inflame students towards the revolutionary movements and to recruit as many members as possible because when the organisation would be strong enough the work would not fail even on the arrest of members. He also said that the mission of the *Samiti* would not be quite fulfilled unless and until Bihar would join their hands with Bengal and the other provinces in the movement, and this would give a connected link from Bengal to the Punjab."¹²

10 Note on *Rash Behari Lal*, arrested on March 28, 1917, interned at his home in Bhagalpur.

11 Extract from a statement made by Rash Behari Lal on March 29, 1917.

12 Extract from the subsequent statement of Rash Behari Lal made on July 10-11, 1917.

Regarding the activities of Rebati Nag, another approver—a student of the Barari High English School, Bhagalpur made the following statement on December 20, 1917, “Rebati impressed upon me that the British had ruined us by obstructing the growth of nationalism in India and checking the progress of education and other good causes which go to build up our nationality. Rebati further said that the British were holding a thousand times better appointments than the Indians and were taking always all the wealth of our motherland. The British, he said, were trying to keep us as a servile nation all throughout our lives. He quoted several instances of Bengal and said how beautifully the members of the revolutionary party were working there and that it was our duty here to raise ourselves in the level with them and a time would come when we 33 crores of Indian by proper unity would free our Motherland and make her free from the British nation. He went on to show that out of 33 crores only three crores were getting bread and the rest were starving in India.

“Rebati further told us that a Government like one held by late Ram Chandra, Dasarath and Janak of the golden age (Ramayan period) with ministers like the saint Bishwamitra, should be established in India by expelling the British. In short, he said that we ought to have a model Government like the one in the golden age, when there was no famines or sin among the governing body and the people. He quoted several passages from the Ramayan to impress me further”.¹³

Another post box, Chakradhar Prasad was a student of Bhagalpur Zila School and had been living with his uncle Jag Mohan Prasad at Jogsar, a Mohalla in Bhagalpur town. Besides him, his two cousins Shyama Prasad and Adya Prasad were also associated with Rebati Nag's movement. According to a government report three registered parcels from Calcutta including one posted at Pathuriaghat (the headquarter of the party) addressed to Chakradhar Prasad C/o Jagmohan Prasad were delivered at the Jogsar house during the period Rebati was in Bhagalpur. The receipts were signed by Adya Prasad.¹⁴

13 Extract from a Statement made by Satya Narayan Chaudhari on December 20, 1917.

14 Note on *Chakradhar Prasad*, arrested on March 28 and interned at his home in Bhagalpur.

In an intercepted letter addressed to Chun Chun Pandey the writer had suggested that Chakradhar and his two cousins should make partial confession in order to get lenient treatment, but not disclose anything of particular importance. The police recovered from the Jogsur house, a well-known stronghold of the party, many inflammatory literature. Adya Prasad had already removed some books and papers belonging to Rebati Nag after latter's disappearance from the house.¹⁵ Shyama Prasad attempted to conceal a Bengali leaflet, entitled "letter from elder brother on duty". The leaflets contained frequent references of the past glory of India contrasted with the miserable condition during the British rule. These leaflets had been found in circulation in Bengal and its packet had been recovered from a revolutionary stronghold in Chandernagore.¹⁶

Adya Prasad was also arrested on June 23, 1917. From the house of Charu Chandra Ghosh, police recovered a book called *Bharat Gitanjali*. A copy of this book was also recovered from the place of Jogendra Bhattacharji and Gopendra Chakravarty.¹⁷

The third post box Chun Chun Prasad Pande (alias Hun Hun alias K no. 1) was incharge of the *Kanya Kubja* branch of the *Samiti*. Its members were Kanya Kubja brahmin living in a mess known as Kanya Kubja mess.¹⁸ It was Rebati who had started the *Kanya Kubja* branch under the leadership of Chun Chun Pande who used to communicate with him after he disappeared from Bhagalpur. It was ascertained that Rebati used to hold secret meetings with Chun Chun Pande, Bateswar Pande and Satya Narayan Chaudhary in the Kanya Kubja hostel to discuss the affair of the party.¹⁹ After the disappearance of Rebati party-members used to send letters and registered parcels to Bateswar Pande at the Kanya Kubja hostel.²⁰

The head Pandit of Marwari Pathshala, Abhoy Nath Missir and two other teachers Mahabir Prasad and Kailash Behari Lal (brother

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Note on *Shyama Prasad*, arrested on June 23, 1917 and interned at his village home in Bhagalpur.

¹⁷ Note on *Charu Chandra Ghosh*, interned at his house in Bhagalpur on October 30, 1917.

¹⁸ Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 36 of 1918.

¹⁹ Note on *Chun Chun Pande*, arrested on July 26, 1917 and interned at his house in Bhagalpur District.

²⁰ Note on *Bateswar Pande*, interned at his home in Bhagalpur district on October 30, 1917.

of Rash Behari Lal) were also associated with the *Kanya Kubja* Branch. Chaturbhuj Marwari, a prominent member of the group, and Panchkauri Basu also used to attend with others the closed door meeting at Kanya Kubja hostel.²¹

According to the government report a branch of the *Samiti*, had also been established at Banka, a sub-divisinnal town, in Bhagalpur district. On July 26, 1917, the police recovered from the room of Manindra Nath Ghosh a letter from one Jogesh of Banka which referred to a society known as *Uttar-Rarhi Kayastha Society* which existed for the physical, intellectual and moral improvement of Kayastha students.²²

In July 1917 when Jogendra Bhattacharji (alias Panditji) and Gopendra Chakravarty (alias K. P.) were arrested after they threatened to murder an informer, the police recovered from their Khalifabagh house in Bhagalpur a set of rules for Sadhak Sampradaya Society similar to the rules found in Bengal which were used as the basis of prosecution in *Barisal Conspiracy Case*, rules for establishing branch organisation and retreats for absconders, a highly seditious Bengali poem eulogising prominent revolutionaries, seditious books and leaflets and manuscripts in the handwriting of Rebati Mohan Nag.²³

Ganesh Prasad Chaudhury²⁴ of Colgong, a first year student of T.N.J. College, Murali Dhar Chaudhuri²⁵ and other *Samiti* members were also arrested. Among the detenus was also an ex-student of Bolpur school, who had come to Bhagalpur for hatching a Conspiracy to assassinate the police officers. His arrest was followed by a widely published letter from Rabindra Nath Tagore protesting against the outrage done to an innocent student.²⁶ Consequently, he was transferred to Bengal.

The government also suspected Satish Chandra Basu, sub-judge of Monghyr, connected with revolutionary organisation. In April 1918 two political suspects Thakur Das Baba and Dr. J. N. Mitra put up with Satish Chandra Basu when they visited Monghyr. Another

21 Political (Special), G.B.O. File no. 36 of 1918.

22 Note on *Manindra Nath Ghosh*, interned at his house in the Bhagalpur district on October 30, 1917

23 Political (Special), G.B.O.. File no. 36 of 1918.

24 Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 302 of 1918.

25 Political (Special), G.B.O.. File no. 299 of 1918.

26 Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 169 of 1918.

political suspect of Bengal Jogendra Nath Basu, a great friend of Bepin Chandra Pal, was Mama Sasur (Mother-in-law's brother) of the sub-Judge. Sarishchandra Basu, the sub-judge's son, was a close associate of a local party member Panna Lal Chakravarty. It should also be mentioned that when Satish Chandra Basu was sub-judge at Patna in 1915, Thakur Das Baba stayed with him for some days.²⁷

In April 1918 Police arrested Sukhdeo Pasi in Monghyr.²⁸ On July 17, 1919 Hari Prasanna Ray Chaudhuri and Pratul Mukherji of Monghyr were arrested and expelled from the province.²⁹

According to a government report Kishori Mohan Singh, an important member of the Bhagalpur and Gaya branch of the *Samiti*, was also connected with the revolutionists in Monghyr. He was in correspondence with the absconders in Monghyr who had asked him for money. In his possession some cypher documents were found containing name of a post office of revolutionary in Monghyr. It was Mathura Prasad C/o Munshi Ameer Ali, Mukhtear, Ghositola, Monghyr. From inquiries it was found that Mathura Prasad was treasurer of the party. From his possession over Rs. 51 were found which was considered to be party fund.³⁰

Kishori Mohan Singh (alias Vedantist), it was learnt, had established in Gaya a retreat for absconders. He had obtained admission into the Sahebganj High School, Gaya, by means of a forged transfer certificate prepared by Nalinikant Bagchi and Sukhdeo Pathak. He hired a house in Gaya in which Rebati Mohan Nag took refuge after leaving Bhagalpur. He also helped provide safe hiding place for Bihari Das, Mohini Bhattacharya, Nalinikant Ghose, Ketra Mohan Singh (alias Kartar Singh) and others.³¹

Kishori Mohan Singh was son of Saroda Prasad Singh of Lachmipur, Bhagalpur. Van Pratap Lal, his classmate, acted as post box for Gaya branch of the *Samiti*. Inquiries revealed that he received letters and Parcels addressed "Van Prasad, care of Harihar Nath, Purani Gudam" from Calcutta for Kishori Mohan Singh. Van Pratap

27 Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 401 of 1918.

28 Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 237 of 1918.

29 Bihar and Orissa Police *Abstract of Intelligence*, July 26 and August 30, 1919.

30 Deputy Inspector-General Police, Crime and Railways to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa, Patna, March 10, 1918.

31 Political (Special), G.B.O., File no 36 of 1918.

Lal was son of Gursahai Lal, resident of Gurua, who was living with his brother-in-law, Kishun Pratap. Kishun Pratap's elder brother's name was Harihar Prasad to whom the house belonged in which they lived.³²

In Gaya Kishori Mohan recruited Sukhdeo Pathak, a student of Sahebganj School and Nand Kishore Missir, a student of Haran Chandra School as members of the party.³³ Sukhdeo Pathak was son of Ramdhari Pathak of Naya Gaon (Sonepur) in Saran district. Likewise, another member of the *Samiti* Brahmdeo Pathak recruited Chotan Singh, son of Ram Pergash Singh of village Baragaon Amhara (Maner) in Patna District. Chotan Singh was a student of Mahilong School. According to Chotan Singh among the members of the Gaya branch of the *Samiti* were Gaya Prasad, Baldeo Prasad (a student of fourth class, Gaya Model School), Raj Kumar (a homoeopathy student), Bhagawati Ram (4th class student of H.C. School), Ram Chandra Prasad (a fifth class student of Zila School) and one Sharma. Among Gaya members Chotan Singh had recruited only Gaya Prasad.³⁴

Just at the time of inquiry, Sukhdeo Pathak disappeared and was found at Muzaffarpur on June 25. His arrest disclosed the activities of *Dacca Anushilan Samiti* at Muzaffarpur which was the Divisional headquarters of North Bihar. The police recovered from his house a type-writer stolen from Muzaffarpur police office, 13 Kukries, a loaded 12 bore cartridge and objectionable books and manuscripts in English, Hindi and Bengali.³⁵ Sukhdeo Pathak told the police that the stolen type-writer had been placed in the house by Jaleshwar Singh (alias Mani Mitra) and objectionable literature belonged to Bihari Da. He asserted that both Jaleshwar Singh and Bihari Da took him to Muzaffarpur from Gaya.³⁶

A letter signed by Bihari-Da was also recovered from the possession of Brahmdeo Pathak (Sukhdeo's brother) in which the writer had expressed considerable alarm at Sukhdeo's arrest. From Brahmdeo's

32 Note on *Van Pratap Lal*, arrested on April 4, 1917, interned at his house in Gaya district.

33 DIGP, Crime and Railways, to Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar and Orissa, Patna, March 10, 1918.

34 Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 318 of 1918.

35 Note on *Sukhdeo Pathak*, arrested on June 28, 1917. Interned at his house in Saran district

36 *Ibid.*

possession a seditious picture was also recovered which represented a scene in Hindu Mythology. It consisted of a figure of a goddess marked "National awakening", brandishing weapons in her eight hands. The weapons were unity, swadeshi, swaraj, self-reliance, independence, self-respect, and self-dependence. This figure was trampling on various other figures of men and beasts and attaching them with the weapons in her hands. The figures that were being destroyed were "oppression, dependence, foreign trade, British goods, weakness, section 124 Indian Penal Code, deportation and hostility" to the country. At the top were three couplets (1) Misery consists in everything being under another's control, happiness consists in everything being under one's own control (2) *Bande Mataram*—praised be the goddess of independence, victory to India (3) Remember me always and fight. Inset is a small portrait of Sridha Banam Nagarkar who was convicted and sentenced to three year's imprisonment under section 124A, Indian Penal Code at Nasik in 1910. This picture was considered seditious. It suggested connection with Bihari Da and Vinayak Rao Kapile.³⁷

An exercise book was also recovered in which was, among other writings, an essay written and signed by Brahmadeo Pathak, entitled "How can we make progress". The writer discussed Brahmacharya, Siksha, Paropkar (altruism), Samaj and National progress on familiar revolutionary lines. For example :

"Now-a-days the advent of foreigners had reduced our native society to ashes and rendered it dependent. Had our society been capable of progressing we would never have been dependent on others. It is only due to social deterioration that our country and we ourselves are at present in a degraded condition. Alas !

"Our advancement or degradation consists in the advancement or otherwise of India. Our country which was once on a high mountain is now crumbling to dust. The reader should be up and doing for the advancement of the country by observing 'Brahmacharya' and dedicating his life to the cause. If you look round you will see how many greatmen in India have renounced their wealth and kith and kin and sacrificed their lives in the cause of the country's progress. For example Karambir Gandhi is wandering about like a beggar for his country's progress, leaving his home and property and has often to

37 Note on *Brahmadeo Pathak*, arrested on 27 August 1917. Interned at his house in Saran. He was a student of Gaya School.

undergo imprisonment. Lala Hardayalji received éducation, in foreign countries and on returning to this country spread it for the purpose of the progress, and for this reason he also has been imprisoned. Fellow students behold before your eyes now they have renounced their all and sacrificed their lives in the cause of progress, in this way we should also dedicate our lives to the same cause."³⁸

Brahmadeo admitted writing the essay but said that he obtained his ideas partly from reading school books and partly from attending home rule meetings and hearing Durga Prasad, the Gaya Vakil and Home Rulers speak.

During the course of investigation it was established that the *Samiti* had deputed Prafulla Ranjan Das Gupta to Muzaffarpur as Divisional organiser for Tirhut and Prafulla Biswas as his assistant. It was also corroborated by the statement of Bihari-Da made to the United Province Police. According to Bihari-Da Rebati visited Muzaffarpur in early 1916 and recruited a first year student as member of the *Samiti* which followed the deputation of Prafulla Ranjan Das Gupta.³⁹

Prafulla Das Gupta (alias Biru) a third year student of G.B.B. College, was son of Jnana Ranjan Das Gupta, Nazir of Brahmanbaria, District Tippera, Bengal. He was previously in Calcutta when the Deputy Superintendent of Police Basanta Kumar Chatterjee was murdered. Although he did not take active part in the murder, he helped to unload at his lodging in Calcutta one of the mauser pistols used for the murder. He was arrested on December 4, 1916 under Defence of India (Consolidation) Rules and interned at Muzaffarpur.⁴⁰

As he was a native of Bengal, the Government of Bihar asked the Central Government to authorise the Government of Bihar and Orissa to send him to Bengal. Consequently the Central Government authorise Bihar Government and Prafulla was taken to Calcutta to hand over to Bengal police.⁴¹

Bihari-Da recruited Dharendra Mohan Dutta and Satyendra Mohan Dutta to the *Samiti* who assisted him in escaping after Sukhdeo

38 *Ibid.*

39 Marriot, E.L., 'Note on Muzaffarpur', April 12, 1918.

40 From H McPherson, Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar and Orissa to Secretary to the Government of India (Home), January 20, 1917.

41 Political (Special). G.B.O., File no. 1470 of 1916.

Pathak's arrest. Bihari-Da made over to them 4 revolvers, 2 guns and some ammunition.⁴² Dharendra and Satyendra were sons of Jnanendra Mohan Dutt, a pleader of Muzaffarpur. On March 11, 1916 police recovered from the possession of two absconders of the *Samiti* certain cypher papers including two Muzaffarpur addresses—"Malekhani, Prof. Muzaffarpur" and "Jnanendra Mohan Dutt, pleader Maz". Against the first word the numerals 21 and against the second 10. It was considered that the figures referred to ammunition.⁴³

In August 1917 Mani Mitra, Kishori Mohan Singh and two local recruits from Bhagalpur, Probode Chandra Ray and Sudhangsu Basu, were posted at Muzaffarpur. After the arrest of Prafulla Ranjan Das Gupta, Kanhai Lal Rai Chaudhari, a fourth year student of the G.B.B. College took the lead in revolutionary activities.⁴⁴

On April 11, 1918 police arrested from a house in Naikabazar, Muzaffarpur town Purna Chandra Ray, Bibhangsu Mohan Bose, Jotir May Ray and Norendra Kumar Sen. From their possession were recovered one curtise's gun, powder flask containing about $\frac{1}{2}$ lb gun powder, 13 assorted revolver and pistol cartridges, one both edged clasp knife, one chisel, one railway key and a quantity of seditious literature.⁴⁵ On April 14, 1918 another batch of revolutionaries were arrested. They were Ramanand Prasad Chaudhary, Satyendra Mohan Dutta, and Banwari Lal. Ramanand and Banwari Lal were Muzaffarpur post boxes for *Samiti*.

From Ramanand's house a letter with its cover was seized. The stamp bearing the impress of the king Emperor on the cover had been refaced and below it had written in Ramanand's handwriting "May God bestow defeat on our king, the V George". The cover was addressed to him and received in Muzaffarpur post office on January 22, 1918 as the post seal showed.⁴⁶

The *Dacca Anushilan Samiti* also established its branch at Bankipore (Patna) although the leader of the *Baranas Anushilan Samiti*

42 Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 455 of 1918.

43 *Ibid.*

44 Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Crime and Railways, to Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar and Orissa, Patna, April 15, 1918.

45 Political (Special), G B O., File no. 455 of 1918.

46 *Ibid.*

was also operating there.⁴⁷ *Dacca Anushilan Samiti* recruited students of Patna Collegiate, Ram Mohan Roy Seminary, B. N. College and other educational institutions.

The *Samiti* sent Nalini Bagchi to Bankipore as Divisional organiser with introduction letter to Atul Chandra Mazumdar who was well-known to Bihari-Da when he came to Bankipore in 1914 to deposit some seditious books with Bankim, the leader of *Banaras Samiti*. It was Bankim who had introduced Atul to him.⁴⁸ Atul was also a friend of Prafulla Kumar Biswas, the associate of Prafulla Ranjan Das Gupta. Atul, a native of Jessore district but residing in Purnea, was a student of Bihar National College.⁴⁹

According to a government report once Prafulla Kumar Biswas gave Atul a liberty leaflet to read but he returned it disapproving the ideas of political dacoities and murder mentioned there in. But to his great surprise the leaflet was found pasted on the wall of B. N. College a week later.⁵⁰ Atul, however, took part in disseminating seditious leaflets along with Raghubir Singh, who was sent to Allahabad from Patna by the *Dacca Anushilan Samiti* to carry on the conspiracy there. Atul also recruited Jatin Das Gupta, who disappeared soon after Atul's arrest⁵¹ on August 27, 1916. Atul, who was associated both with the *Banaras and Dacca Anushilan Samiti*, was interned on September 23, 1916. He made frank admission of his participation in the revolutionary conspiracy.⁵²

Nalini Bagchi after coming to Bankipore obtained admission into B. N. College in July, 1916. He was in close touch with Rebati Mohan Nag before and after the latter's disappearance. But he left Bankipore for Gaya when Raghubir Singh was prosecuted. There ensued presumably as a result of this case, a period of inactivity in

47 For details about the activities of *Banaras Anushilan Samiti* in Patna see Srivastav, N.M.P., *Bihar me Rashtriayata ka Vikas*, Bihar Hindi Granth Academy, Patna, 1974, pp. 35-40.

48 Statement of Priyanath Bhattacharji, Bihar Special Branch, Patna, April 30, 1918.

49 Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 242 of 1918.

50 *Ibid.*

51 Note on persons dealt with under the Defence of India (Consolidation) Rules and Regulation III of 1818 in the Provinces excluding Bhagalpur and Gaya District.

52 Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Crime and Railways, to Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar and Orissa, Patna, April 2, 1919.

Bankipore but absconders visited the place frequently in 1917. At Bankipore post boxes and retreats for absconders also existed. The party was also in possession of revolvers one of which had been stolen from the house of a police officer.⁵³ Police recovered from the house of Naresh Chandra Ghose (proved to be Brajendra Lal Bannerji) a quantity of seditious literature.⁵⁴ He was a probationary signaller in the Bankipore Telegraph office.

Chotan Singh, whose society name was Kuer Singh, left his studies in Gaya in 1916 and came to Patna. Nalini Bagchi engaged one Ajit to teach Chotan Singh privately.⁵⁵ Among the members of the Bankipore branch of the *Samiti* were Nand Kishore Tiwary (appeared for Matric at Patna Collegiate School), Thakur Prasad (2nd Class student, Patna Collegiate School), Surendra Prasad Singh (3rd Class student, Patna Collegiate School), Dhanraj Sharma⁵⁶ (Ram Mohan Roy Seminary), Basant (B. N. College), Sonelal, Brahmadeo (1st Class student of Patna Collegiate), Ram Khelawan Singh Kahar (1st Class, Patna Collegiate School), Jai Prakash Singh (1st Class, Patna Collegiate School), Raja Singh (Matric appeared from Patna Collegiate) and Radha Raman (1st Class, Patna Collegiate School).⁵⁷ Dwarka Prasad and Ram Kishun Basu were the post boxes in Bankipore.

Due to some differences with the *Samiti*, Dhanraj Sharma later started a separate society of which Lakshmi Narayan (alias sharma) was the Commander. Basant Kumar Lal was an important member of this group which had great following in B. N. College. Among other members of Sharma group were Chhatrapati, a former student of Patna Collegiate and some other 2nd Class students of T. K. Ghose Academy.⁵⁸ Dhanraj Sharma also induced Chotan Singh to join his group and help Commission of dacoities but the latter declined.⁵⁹ According to the statement of Sonelal, Sharma group possessed a book which dealt with preparation of bombs. It also brought out a seditious manuscript magazine *Videsh* containing a picture of Sri Aurobindo.⁶⁰

53 Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 36 of 1918.

54 Bihar and Orissa Police *Abstract of Intelligence*, December 7, 1918

55 Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 318 of 1918.

56 Supplementary Statement of Chotan Singh, File no. 318 of 1918.

57 Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Crime and Railways, to Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar and Orissa, Patna, May 20, 1918.

58 *Ibid.*

59 Supplementary Statement of Chotan Singh, File no. 318 of 1918.

60 Supplementary Statement of Sonelal, File no. 318 of 1918.

According to a government report in Arrah there was a society known as Moonlight Club which was seditious in character. The persons connected with it were all important members of the *Dacca Anushilan Samiti*, who were in hiding in Bihar.⁶¹ Anath Bandhu Ghosh (alias Nandalal) had been sent to Arrah by Philosopher (Prabhas Lahiri) to organise the party in 1917. In July 1917 Priya Nath Bhattacharya had also made his headquarters at Arrah. Paudit (alias Jogesh Bhattacharya), Ajit Singh (Alias Prabhas Lahiri), Publisher (alias Nalini Bagchi), Purna Chandra Ray and Khetra Mohan Singh were active in Arrah in propagating the cause of revolution.⁶²

The local party in Arrah was known as *Nowaza*. Its leader Baijnath Sahay had a revolver. Its other members were Kapildeo, Hardwar Marwari, Satish Chandra Ghosh, and Jagannath Prasad. There was also an organisation at Buxar. Its members were Hrishideo (alias Sarbadanand Mishra), Kapildeo (alias Murari, brother of Sarbadanand), Ganga Narayan Mukherji, Patal and Jibanand.⁶³

The *Dacca Anushilan Samiti* had also extended its operation to Samastipur and Darbhanga. Ganesh Prasad was an important member of Samastipur branch where many local students had been recruited as members of the party.

Long before the establishment of retreat in Darbhanga for absconders Kanhai Lal Banarji, originally a member of Jatin Mukherji group, had started in 1915 a Club known as *Youngmen's Sporting Club*⁶⁴ with the idea of fostering a spirit of unity and patriotism. It was situated on the bank of Beta tank in Laheriasarai. A rich man of the town Bilat Gani had financed it, whose members included Umar Nath Datta, Suran Kumar Singh, Manindra Nath Lal Lahiri, Mritunjaya Mukherji, Harendra Nath Ghosh, Sachindra Nath Gosh, Suraj Kumar Ghosh, Narendra Nath Barat, Akhil Bandhu Bagchi and Indra Nath De—all 1st, 2nd and 3rd Class students of the Northbrook School. Later Kanhai Lal Bannerjee helped amalgamate Jatin group with *Dacca Anushilan Samiti*. The members of Jatin's group Sanyal, Kanhai, Suran and Bagchi joined the *Samiti*.

61 Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 396 of 1918.

62 *Ibid.* Nalini Bagchi was shot in a fight with police

63 Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Crime and Railways, to Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar and Orissa, Patna, October 16, 1918.

64 "Dacca Anushilan Samiti's Connection in Darbhanga", Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 412 of 1918.

Scholar (alias Mani Mitra alias Jaleshwar Singh) was incharge of the Darbhanga branch.⁶⁵ Among other members of the *Samiti* were Suresh Chandra Mukherji of Laheriasarai, Pipa (Suresh's younger brother), Manindra Nath Lahiri, Dineshwar Mishra of Darbhanga, Achutanand Das and Suraj Narain Jha of Jhanjharpur. Ganga Prasad Agrawal, a student of the 1st Class of Darbhanga Raj School was also a member and Radha Charan Lal was a sympathiser. Kamleshwar Prasad, a teacher of Saraswati School, Jagannath Prasad, a teacher of Marwari School, were members of a separate party.

The absconding members of the Bhagalpur branch visited Darbhanga from time to time to organise the party.

The *Samiti* had also established retreat in Purnea. Dakshina Ranjan Sen (alias Pagal) was the District organiser of the *Samiti* in Purnea. The members possessed arms and ammunition there.⁶⁶ Besides Dakshina Ranjan Sen, Ramanand Prasad Chaudhary was also a district organiser in Purnea.⁶⁷ Vishwanath Jha of village Khariya under Araria Police Station was also connected with the *Samiti*.⁶⁸

On December 13, 1918 the Superintendent of Police, Hazaribagh, arrested Ram Binode Singh, son of constable Jai Kishun Singh, a student of St. Columba's College. He was found identical with a member known as Jotin from whom letters had been intercepted in Bengal dealing with Bihar affairs and with the proposed murder mentioned.⁶⁹

The action taken by the authorities under Defence of India (Consolidation) Rules were not sufficient to stamp out the movement. On February 25, 1918 Kishori Mohan told the Sub-Inspector of Police, Maheshwari Prasad, in Muzaffarpur Jail that the cause of their mission would continue flourishing still and the persecution of some of the members would only prompt many others to take their place."⁷⁰

The Superintendent of Bhagalpur had written to the authorities that Rash Bihari Lal and Shyama Prasad were prepared to go to any lengths if given opportunity. He had suggested to permit no relaxation

65 *Ibid.*

66 Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 36 of 1918.

67 Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 455 of 1918

68 Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 19 of 1919.

69 Police Abstract of Intelligence, January 11, 1919.

70 DIG Crime and Railways to Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar and

of the terms of internment in the case of any of the detenus connected with the Bhagalpur Party. The more dangerous people should be located in foreign domiciles away from their own associates.⁷¹ The suggestion was based on the statement of Bateshwar Pande to the police. Rash Behari had told him to unite with firm determination to carry out the object of the mission. The CID officer stationed at Bhagalpur should be murdered and internment orders should be disobeyed as far as possible.⁷²

According to E. L. Marriott—"The methods followed have been exactly similar to those that have been overwhelmingly proved to be the means adoption by the *Dacca Anushilan Samiti* in Bengal in preparing youngmen for revolutionary work. That so far there have been no outrages or criminal offences is probably due partly to the causes already mentioned, and partly to the fact that the police got wind of the organisation before any very great progress had been made. In spite of this, however, in Bhagalpur alone some 30 local boys at least appear to have become actual members and not less than twice that number have been directly or indirectly imbued with seditious and anti-British ideas. More than one boy has admitted that he was prepared to go to any lengths and take any risks in furtherance of the society's aims and though these protestations may have no great sincerity it is none the less obvious that this seed in many cases have fallen upon fertile ground and that a revolutionary forcing ground had actually been established."⁷³

Orissa, March 10, 1918.

71 Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Crime and Railways, to Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar and Orissa, February 6, 1918.

72 Political (Special), G.B.O., File no. 97 of 1918.

73 Marriott, E. L., *op. cit.*

BENGAL CONGRESS TANGLE

1939-40

PRANAB KUMAR CHATTERJEE

During 1939-40 the Indian freedom struggle entered a crucial stage of its development. The Indian National Congress came face to face with serious challenges both from within and outside. While the Muslim League threw a direct challenge by its new battle cry for Pakistan, acute conflict overtook the central Congress leadership in the wake of the opposition of Subhas Bose, the Congress President, to dominating Gandhian leadership in the Congress. Although Bose was successful in defeating Gandhiji's candidate in the Congress presidential election in January 1939, Bose was defeated in the second round in the Tripuri Congress in March 1939 where Bose was chained by the pro-Gandhi Pant resolution. Bose could not swallow this bitter pill and ultimately resigned from Congress Presidehtship in the turbulent A.I.C.C. meeting held in Calcutta at the end of April 1939. But Bose-High command conflict did not subside and it assumed a new character. Serious conflict developed between pro-Bose Bengal Congress and the All India Congress Committee. The Bengal Congress—A.I.C.C. conflict continued throughout 1939-40 till the Bengal Congress was suspended by the Congress High command in February 1940.

The confrontation between the Bengal Congress and the central leadership came to surface soon after Bose's humiliation at the Tripuri Congress in March 1939. Bose's defeat at Tripuri was welcomed even by Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy, who, while admiring "the ability with which Gandhi succeeded in ousting Bose" expressed the fear that Bose's defeat would "precipitate more direct action in Bengal". That the Bengal Congress refused to accept Bose's defeat with good grace is also borne by the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal. Mr. E. N. Blandy's report that the leaders of Bengal Congress "will probably seek for opportunities within the Province of Bengal to reassert themselves and work up a campaign on some grievances of

1 John Glendevon—*Viceroy at Bay*, p 116 & 121.

other"². In another report, he predicted "a decisive and irreparable breach between Bose brothers and Gandhi" at the forthcoming A.I.C.C. session to be held in Calcutta at the end of April 1939. The resignation of Bose at the A.I.C.C. session created deep resentment throughout Bengal. Infact, since Tripuri Bose symbolised the conflict between Bengal and the Congress High Command. Nehru wrote to Krishna Mehon, "For the moment. Subhas has become a kind of symbol of Bengal and it is quite impossible to argue with or about symbols"³. In Nehru's opinion, Subhas was personally "very accommodating and desirous of pulling together", but was surrounded by "undesirable" elements who vitiated the whole atmosphere in Bengal. Nehru explained that the "hostile attitude" of Bengal was the result of "the emergence of communal and semi communal groups who have become champions of Subhas."⁴ But Nehru and his associates were definitely biased in their judgement. They failed to see that Bose was supported by the general masses of Bengal including all the left and Progressive elements. Even the Chief Secretary Blandy clearly stated in his report, "the B.P.C.C. which is mostly leftist and revolutionary in composition may strike out a line of its own with Mr. Bose as leader distinct from and opposed to that of Congress as a whole"⁵.

On the eve of the A.I.C.C. session in Calcutta the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee re-elected Subhas Bose as the President on 21 April 1939 and decided that Bose would announce the names of the new executive of B.P.C.C. within a week. But the announcement came much later on 3 June 1939. At this time Bengal Congress had three distinct groups the dominant Bose group, Khadi group under Dr. P. C. Ghosh and the Pro-A.I.C.C. group led by Kiran Shankar Roy. In the B.P.C.C. the Bose group, had the majority support and had the support of the Communists, Socialists, Youth and students, organisations. The two minority groups were opposed to the Bose group and always co-operated with the Congress High Command in order to dislodge the Bose group from controlling position in Bengal Congress.

2 Home (Political) Files (National Archives of India), File No 18/3/1939.

3 Nehru to Krishna Menon, 4 April, 1939. S. Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of Nehru*, VOL IX, pp 550-552

4 *Ibid.*

5 Home (Political) Files, *op. cit.*

After the A.I.C.C. session in Calcutta the Bengal Congress was getting ready for the coming conflict with the central leadership. On 3 May 1939 Bose formed his Forward Bloc as a new party within the Congress and decided to consolidate all the left forces in the country for the impending fight against the British imperialism. Under Bose's leadership, Bengal Congress became the rallying point of the Forward Bloc. Bose also wanted an all India base to rally round all the leftist forces within the Congress and outside. For this, the left consolidation committee came into being at the time of the 1st All India Forward Bloc Conference held in Bombay on 22 June 1939. The Central Congress leadership got alarmed at the growing offensive of Bose and hit back at the Bombay A.I.C.C. session on 26 June 1939 by passing a resolution prohibiting call for struggle by the lower Congress committees without permission from state committees. Subhas Bose took this as an affront to his programme of immediate struggle and at his behest the left consolidation committee decided to organise an All India Protest Day on 9 July. Rajendra Prasad, the Congress President wired to Bose on 6 July 1939 asking him as President of B.P.C.C. to promote discipline in the Congress by cancelling the Protest Day programme. Subhas Bose refused to accept the directive. The Bengal Congress as expected, followed Bose's lead and passed a resolution criticising the Bombay resolutions. After this, the Protest Day was celebrated on 9 July all over India by the supporters of Bose and Bengal Congress took the lead in this matter.

During July the Bengal Congress got its position enhanced at the time of hunger strike undertaken by the political prisoners in Calcutta to force their demand for unconditional release. This episode had all India repercussions and created strong indignation in public mind in Bengal. The B.P.C.C. openly supported the cause of the hunger strikers. But the central leaders of the Congress only expressed moral support. Lord Linlithgow gave a clean certificate to Gandhi and the right wing for their calm behaviour and expressed his fear that the prolongation of the strike would "strengthen the hands of Bose and the left wing at expense of the right wing"⁶. His apprehension proved to be true and the long drawn strike terminated in August only at the personal intervention of Bose. Thus by July the hostile attitude of Bengal Congress towards Gandhi and his followers became wide open and was even known to the highest level of British Government.

6. Linlithgow to Lord Zetland, 25 July 1939, Zetland Papers (Microfilm), N.M.M.L.

Even Zetland, Secretary of State, had written to Linlithgow that "the feeling of hostility to Mr. Gandhi and his official Congress continues to grow" in Bengal Congress which was "completely dominated by the terrorists"⁷.

From July onwards acute intra party tension grew within the Bengal Congress itself. While the Bose group decided to firmly consolidate its position in the state committee, the two minority groups started a calculated move to align with the Congress high command in order to dislodge the Bose group from the dominating position. A requisition meeting was called on 26 July 1939 and elected the new executive council of the B.P.C.C. Notable leaders of the opposite groups did not turn up at the meeting. In the new executive council of the B.P.C.C., out of 149 members 25 members were replaced by new members drawn mainly from the Socialist Block and the youth front. The opposite groups who had a total strength of 37 in the old executive were now reduced to 13. The new executive council met on 30 July and accepted the resignation of leaders like Dr. B. C. Roy, P. C. Ghosh and Kiran Shankar Roy who belonged to opposite groups. An Elective Tribunal was constituted consisting of three members Dr. Charu Chandra Banerjee, Sri Charu Chandra Roy and Mr. Muzaffar Ahmed. The leaders belonging to opposite groups came out in a press statement on 26 July 1939 criticising the requisition meeting whose purpose, they alleged, would be to remove the minority from the Executive council and to form a partisan election tribunal. They deplored the "tyranny of the majority" who were out to capture the entire Congress organisation in Bengal. It is interesting to note that leaders of anti Bose groups started contacting the high command in early July protesting against the proposed requisition meeting of 26 July⁸. Then on 31 July 1939 a joint memorandum was submitted to the Congress President by the leaders of the minority groups⁹. They demanded that the requisition meeting of 26 July be declared null and void and an impartial election tribunal be constituted by dismissing the 'Partisan' election tribunal of B.P.C.C. After this, anti Bose camp followers of the different district committees in Bengal complained to the Congress high command against the new executive council and the election tribunal.

The Congress High Command also sensed the danger inherent in the

7 Zetland to Linlithgow, 4 July 1939, New Delhi. *Ibid.*

8 Kiran Shankar Roy to Congress General Secretary, 6 July 1939, AICC File No. P 5 (1939), N.M.M.L., New Delhi.

9 A.I.C.C. File No. P 5 (1939), *ibid.*

formation of the new executive council and the election tribunal. They knew it well that they must strike now, otherwise Bengal Congress would slip out of their control for ever. First, the Congress leadership took action against Bose who was the guiding spirit of the Bengal Congress. On 11 August 1939, A.I.C.C. disqualified Bose from the Presidentship of B.P.C.C. and debarred him from membership of any elective Congress committee for three years from 1939. Then action followed against Bengal Congress. On 17 August, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the Congress President, declared null and void the meeting of the B.P.C.C. held on 26 July which had elected the new Executive council. The election tribunal of the Bengal Congress was also declared null and void. The steps taken against Bose and Bengal Congress suggest that the Congress high command was on the war path and would spare no effort to crush the heresy of Bengal Congress. The Bengal Congress also took up the challenge and the executive council deplored the decision of the A.I.C.C. disqualifying their leader Bose and reposed full confidence in his leadership.

On 1 September, the Second World War broke out. Even in the midst of the unprecedented war crisis, the tussle between All India Congress and Bengal Congress continued. The central Congress leaders were determined to establish their control in Bengal Congress. The Congress working committee appointed the Bengal Provincial Congress election tribunal consisting three men of their choice—Satish Chandra Dasgupta, Prof. Kshitish Prasad Chattopadhyay and Prof. Priya Ranjan Sen. These men were Gandhians in their conviction and were totally opposed to Bose group. Soon after the formation of this tribunal, clash began with the Bengal Congress Committee over the respective domain of work. The conflict became acute with regard to Rajshahi District Congress affairs. While the election tribunal directed that the old district committee would continue to function, the B.P.C.C. replaced the old committee by a new one with its supporters. Different District Congress Committees also protested against the interference of the executive council of B.P.C.C. in the working of the Election Tribunal. The Election Tribunal complained to the Secretary of the A.I.C.C. on 1 October 1939 that the B.P.C.C. was not co-operating in its work. Kiranshankar Roy, the leader of anti Bose group demanded that all powers be vested in the Election Tribunal to ensure “a free election of delegates”.¹⁰ Rajendra Prasad, the Congress President, finally gave his judgment in

10 *Ibid.*

favour of the Election Tribunal.¹¹ The B.P.C.C. refused to take notice of the judgment and the executive committee placed no confidence on the Tribunal in its meeting on 30 October. In the same meeting, Mr. Rajendra Deb was elected as the new President of B.P.C.C. The Congress working committee reinforced its stand and directed the B.P.C.C. to work in harmony with the Election Tribunal.

As expected, the warning of the Working committee fell on deaf ears. Now, the working committee realised that the B.P.C.C. would not come under its control on no count. The High Command then went a step further. In its meeting at Wardha held on 21 December 1939, the Congress Working Committee formed an Adhoc Committee for Congress affairs in Bengal consisting of Maulana Azad as Chairman, and Dr. B. C. Roy, P. C. Ghosh, Suresh Banerjee, Kiran Shankar Roy, J. C. Gupta, Annada Prasad Chowdhury and Sri Benoyendra Nath Palit as members. Obviously these men belonged to anti Bose groups and enjoyed the confidence of the Working Committee. The Working Committee directed: "the Adhoc Committee shall function until the new B.P.C.C. is duly formed and its office bearers take charge of the work of the province". The decision of the Working Committee was too much for the B.P.C.C. because now its very existence had been endangered. In a resolution on 30 December 1939 it expressed its inability to accept the Adhoc Committee planted by the Working Committee and asked "not to foist their unwanted Adhoc committee on the Bengal Congress". The executive of the Bengal Congress also authorised Sarat Bose to represent its case before the Congress High Command. But Sarat Bose failed to persuade Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the Congress President, to alter their decision on the Adhoc Committee. On the other hand, the Congress President authorised the Adhoc Committee to conduct organizational elections in Bengal.

Both sides seemed to be moving to the breaking point. The Executive Council of the B.P.C.C. in its resolution of 31 January 1940 once again protested against the appointment of the Adhoc Committee and called upon the district and other Primary Congress Committees "not to co-operate in any manner" with the Adhoc committee.

It also resolved to observe 11 February, 1940 as "the Bengal Congress Day" throughout the province to indicate its stand. The Bengal Congress executive further resolved to postpone all Congress elections in Bengal "in view of the inevitability of the National Struggle".

11 *Ibid.*

Thus a deadlock was created in the Bengal Congress and both sides were not ready to give way to the other. As a result, Congress elections did not take place and Bengal could not even participate in the Congress Presidential Election which was held on 15 February 1940. In order to solve the deadlock, Sarat Bose came forward with his proposal of referendum. But the Congress President would not agree to it. Instead he argued that the issue was "not of corruption violence or anything of that sort, but simply of the relation that ought to subsist between them". The Congress President demanded unquestioned obedience and loyalty from the lower body for the cause of discipline in the organisation. On the other hand, Subhas Bose considered action of the Working committee as an attempt to suppress the leftists of Bengal.

In the month of February, the confrontation reached its logical culmination. The B.P.C.C. proceeded on its own line of consolidating its position throughout the province and disaffiliated three anti-B.P.C.C. district committees of Mymensingh, Hooghly and Jessore for their "continued disobedience". Three organizing district committees replaced the old committees. This strong action infuriated the leaders of the opposite groups who apprehended that their very existence was at stake. Naturally, leaders like Surendra Mohan Ghosh, President, Mymensingh P.C.C., Kiran Shankar Roy and others wrote to the Congress President for taking immediate and drastic action against hostile B.P.C.C. Kiran Shankar Roy even suggested that B.P.C.C. should be suspended otherwise subordinate committees could not function "with divided loyalties".¹²

Ultimately came the final decision of the working committee at Patna on 24 February 1940 under article XIII of the Congress Constitution, the B.P.C.C. was suspended and all the powers were vested in the Adhoc Committee. Again, the disciplinary action taken by B.P.C.C. against three District Congress Committees were declared null and void. The decision of the Working committee was criticised by the B.P.C.C. as "unjust and unjustifiable" and considered as "clear violation of the internal democracy" of the Congress organisation. The B.P.C.C. condemned the "Vendetta against the B.P.C.C. in particular and the leftists in general". The action, in B.P.C.C.'s opinion, intended to suppress the Congress majority in the province by putting "a small clique in office and power to do its bidding".

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

Year long confrontation between B.P.C.C. and the Congress high command was over and the Working committee succeeded in dislodging B.P.C.C. from power in Bengal and installing its loyal men in controlling position in the Congress affairs of Bengal. But the Bengal Congress tangle cannot be regarded as the offspring of group rivalry within Bengal Congress. It was part of the wider conflict between B.P.C.C. and the All India Congress. Throughout 1939-40. the Congress Working Committee interfered in the affairs of Bengal Congress and deliberately aligned with the anti Bose groups in Bengal. We fail to understand Nehru's opinion that "the real conflict about the Bengal affairs has its basis in Bengal itself", and that the Working Committee had no other way out because "Subhas Bose has made it exceedingly difficult for the Working committee to act otherwise"¹⁴. But Nehru's brief for the Working committee cannot be impartial. He all along sided with the Congress high command against Subhas Bose though indirectly. This was because Bose "was his most serious rival for Indian political leadership once Gandhiji passed from the scene"¹⁵. Naturally, even Nehru, not to speak of die-hard Gandhians, expressed happiness at the strong action taken by the Working Committee against the B.P.C.C. "Subhas Bose is going to piece" Nehru confided to Krishna Menon. Nehru even went to personal level and commented that "Bose does not seem to have any idea in his head and except on talking about leftists and rightists he says little that is intelligible"¹⁶. In fact what had started at Tripuri as the first act of the drama reached its epilogue in February 1940.

In 1939 Bose had to resign from the Congress Presidentship, now he lost his organisational machinery in Bengal. The way ward BPCC was crushed and loyal Adhoc committee became the official Bengal Congress.

The new leaders of the Bengal Congress failed to consolidate their position in Bengal. This was because they lacked wide mass support in Bengal. In fact, the suspended BPCC dominated by Bose group had the active support of different fidence of the students and youths of Bengal. Satin Sen, a noted Gandhian leader of Barisal deplored that the people of Bengal "are outrageous anti Congress and

14 Nehru to Krishna Menon, 2 March 1940, India League Papers, N.M.M.L. New Delhi.

15 M. Braher, *Nehru, a Political biography*, p. 245

16 Nehru to Krishna Menon, 2 March 1940 *op. cit.*

anti Gandhi".¹⁷ As such, the official Congress failed to carry the people of Bengal with their line of action. Ten leaders of Bengal Congress in a letter to the Congress President expressed their helplessness to work out Gandhi's proposal at the Ramgarh Congress in March 1940 that every Congress committee should be turned into a Satyagraha committee. They admitted that "organisationally Bengal is not yet ready for a fight" and even called Gandhi's proposal as "untimely and hasty fight"¹⁸.

In this way, inspite of apparent victory of the Working Committee and its only men in dislodging Bose-controlled Bengal Congress, they suffered moral defeat. The plight of the official BPCC in consolidating its position continued. Even in May 1940 Arun Chandra Guha, Secretary of the official B.P.C.C. confessed that "some Congress committee are yet in a mood of revolt against the present B.P.C.C." and described "the overall condition in the Congress organization in Bengal is chaotic". Naturally the official Congress made a poor show in future national struggle in Bengal and the people belonging to the suspended B.P.C.C. contributed most to the coming struggle and obviously suffered most on the wheel of repression.

17 AICC File No. P 5 (Pt. II), 1940, N.M.M.L.

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

PROVINCIAL FINANCES IN THE UNITED PROVINCES OF AGRA AND OUDH UNDER SIR WILLIAM MALCOLM HAILEY

(1928—1934)

ANIL KUMAR MISRA

The story of financial administration of the United Provinces after the introduction of 1919 Reforms was largely that of a struggle between the Central and the Provincial Governments for an equitable financial adjustment through economy and recourse to additional taxation. The devolution between the 'reserved' and the 'transferred' subjects had not worked well in the 'Provinces', for the transferred subjects were gradually starved of funds as is clear from the figures of 1921-22 and 1923-24.¹ The United Provinces Government was to spend 352 lakhs of rupees on the Transferred Departments in 1921-22 whereas the sum was reduced to 314 lakhs in 1923-24.² The result was obvious; far from being any marked development in the 'nation-building' schemes and services entrusted to the ministers here was a curtailment in the grants to the Transferred subjects. Even the Muddiman Committee had admitted that "the difficulty arising from finance has (had) formed one of the main obstacles to the success of the Reforms".³

Further, the Devolution Rules for allocation of revenues between the Government of India and the Provincial Governments in the financial years 1921-22 had provided that contributions to be paid to the Governor-General-in-Council were to the tune of 240 lakhs by the local Government of United Provinces which figure was second highest in the list of States.⁴ U.P. was an impoverished State with no major

1. Memorandum by Mr. C. Y. Chintamani to the *Reforms Enquiry Committee* (1924), Appendix 5, pp. 279-83; cf. also *Report of the Indian Statutory Commission*, 12 May, 1930, Vol. I, pp. 397-98.

2. Gwyer & Appadorai, *Select Speeches and Documents*, p. 99 (Chart); cf. also Memorandum by C. Y. Chintamani, *Reforms Enquiry Committee*, 1924, Appendix 5, pp. 279-83; cf. also *Report of the Indian Statutory Commission*, 12th May, 1930, Vol. I, p. 397-98.

3. *Report of the Reforms Enquiry Committee*, 1924. para. 56.

4. Gwyer & Appadorai, *op cit.*, p. 26; Keith, A. B., *Constitutional History of India*, p. 256 ff.

industry's to boast of in the early part of the 'thirties of the present century while contributions from Bombay and Bengal—comparatively highly industrialised provinces were 56 to 63 lakhs respectively. The contributions from U.P. demanded by the Government were abnormally high.⁵

The sources of revenue as provided in the Act of 1919 were known 'Receipts accruing from Transferred Subjects'.⁶ These were Land Revenue, Irrigation, Forests, Excise, Stamps and Minerals of which Land Revenue, Excise and Stamps along with Irrigation formed the major sources of provincial revenue. The other source was in the form of proceeds from such taxes as were lawfully imposed for provincial purposes and included tax on entertainment, taxes on Betting and Gambling, Advertisements, Succession Duties, Registration, etc.⁷ The third source was a small trickle in the shape of share doled out by the Centre in revenues derived from Income Tax which was quite insufficient and hardly substantial.⁸

Besides the source enumerated above, there were certain others as well through which the states could get hold of funds and the commonest method was to borrow on the security of its revenue for certain specific purposes for which the State Legislature had given assent.⁹ Minor sources included tolls, octroi, taxes on Building, Vehicles, etc., which of course could be raised from time to time according to the need of the situation. It was under such conditions that the governors had to acquit themselves in the administration of the 'Provinces'. There were certain other limitations as well. The Meston Award had put considerable strain on provincial finance. There was also an inter-provincial discrimination as some Provinces were getting less while others were getting more and the case with U.P. was that it came in the former category.¹⁰ The obvious result was that the Provincial Government did not have enough funds to attend to such 'nation-building' needs as of Education, Sanitation, Development of Industries,

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Act of 1919, Devolution Rules: for certain amendments, cf General Rules and Orders made under Enactments in Force in British India (1926), Vol. I, pp. 211-15, Vide Gwyer & Appadorai, p. 161 ff.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, Schedule I & II.

⁸ *Ibid.*, cf also Singh, V. B., *Economic History of India*, pp. 545-46.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Singh, V. B., *op. cit.*, (Provincial Inequalities), pp. 547-48, Gwyer & Appadorai, *op. cit.*, p. 58 (Chart).

etc. Another incongruity in respect of financial matters was that United Provinces, like other Provincial Governments had to maintain a minimum balance with the Government of India but it could not borrow from that fund without the prior sanction of the Government of India. At the same time the latter, 'in the financial interest of India as a whole required the 'Provinces' to conserve their financial resources for some crises of National Importance.¹¹ The sanctioned amount for U.P. was about 20 lakhs per year.

Sir William Malcolm Hailey came to office in U.P. when the State was passing through a financial crisis and the main task before him was to clear off the financial muddle coming down from earlier years. In this, he was guided by his understanding of things, born of by his past experiences in the Punjab. He claimed for himself to be a follower of "Liberal traditions in politics", yet he believed in a strong and authoritative administration in the State, neither composed of "shifting ministers nor hampered in details of administration by the Legislature."¹² As such, his approach to the pressing problems of the State in respect of financial involvements at the onset of his governorship may be summed up as follows.

Hailey warned the Legislature at the very outset not to be over-optimistic about the outcome of the discontinuation of the much criticised Meston Award. For he was well aware of the overdrafts by the State administration in previous years which were exposed to be wiped out by the said discontinuation. He was anxious to put the ship of the state "on an even keel". Further, he had realized that lack of major industries in the State had limited its revenue which was a great drawback on its finances. To him, the finances of the State, 'were a dead hand of parsimony suppressing every chance of improvement in any sphere of developmental work.'¹³ This aspect of his thinking has to be borne in mind; only then a proper evaluation of all his administrative steps can be made.

It is interesting to note that Hailey was acutely conscious of one phenomenon of imbalance in U.P. He had noted its unequal development and was conscious of the neglect in respect of the eastern

11 Gwyer & Appadorai, *op cit.*, (Fiscal Convention), p. 28, fn 1; cf. Singh, V. B., *op. cit.*, p. 547 for details.

12 *Reports of the Indian Statutory Commission; I.A.R., I*, (Chronicle of Events), cf. also Hailey's Address to the Legislature, referred to earlier, 1928-29.

13 *Ibid*, 1928-29, p. 29.

part of the State. The western districts had been fortunate to have irrigational facilities by a network of several canals and such facility did not exist in the eastern ones. Similarly, major industries were also concentrated in the western parts and only a few sugar mills were functioning as industries and that too in the *Terai* regions of Gorakhpur, Basti and Gonda districts (Gorakhpur and Deoria formed one district in those days).¹⁴

There were other considerations before him as well. Under the existing conditions, he had realised there were no chances of effecting total recovery of the estimated land revenue receipts. Failure of crops, either *Kharif* or *Rabi*, had become a regular feature and there were no adequate facilities in a large part of the State. Any substantial irrigational stabilisation in the prices was still therefore far off. Reference has been made elsewhere to his encouragement to digging up of well, either masonry or otherwise, yet he did not expect much relief. Easily therefore, the conditions were gloomy from all points of view.¹⁵

At the same time, it should be clearly borne in mind that Hailey was 'miserly' towards many of the pressing needs of the State. All he wanted was that every financial involvement should be properly weighed before undertaking it. If money was saved and there was a surplus, it was to be spent in a judicious way. In his view, "a surplus can be almost a great danger ... than a deficit". Such a state could, in his view, prove embarrassing as a surplus might embolden the State Government to embark upon ambitious projects which, however, might be starved in future deficit years.¹⁶ His approach towards financial matters may be summed up on a few word. He was in favour of, "a self-contained account, neither the plus, nor the minus condition of the State."¹⁷

Hailey, therefore, advised the Legislature to give priority to certain items, in framing the yearly budget of the State. Medical and Agricultural department were, therefore, 'to receive highest attention. At the same time, he was in favour of the gradual development of hydro-electric works, Forestry, Co-operation, Higher-Education, Trans-

14 *Ibid.*, 1928-29, p. 24

15 Misra, Anil Kumar, *The Administration of The United Provinces of Agra & Oudh under Sir William Malcolm Hailey*, Chapter V, pp. 135-190.

16 *Report*, (*op. cit.*) ; 1928-29, No 1351, pp. 79-89.

17 *Ibid.*

port-facilities, establishment of major industries, and attention towards the educated unemployed. Hydro-electric works came second only to the development of agriculture as these were to help increase agricultural production, as well as establishment of major industries of which the State was acutely deficient.

During the period under review the beneficiary departments like Education, Medical Public Health, Industries and the like were practically starved for lack of adequate funds. Consequently, its reasons may also be analysed, so as to present a picture of the state of affairs during that the period. The causes may be viewed under two broad heads—(i) natural, and (ii) man-made. So far as natural causes are concerned, we have seen that during the six years' tenure of Hailey as Governor of U.P. the Provinces suffered often times either by a lack of rains or an indifferent rainy season, floods, and also visitations of locusts. It is the man-made causes that have to be assessed in order to bring out their repercussions on the financial position of the State.

Hailey was directed to assume charge of office in the State when not only India, but the entire world was passing through a great economic crisis. Furthermore, the country was passing through difficult political times. In fact the years beginning from 1930 to 1934 were marked by an upsurge of popular national aspirations. Opinions may be divided on this score, but the times were hardly suited to any planned economic development of the State. Agrarian unrest and Civil Disobedience had sapped up much of the energy and funds that could have been directed towards bettering the State's economic conditions. These apart, there were certain constitutional limitations as well, which need to be examined in detail, so that the Finance of U.P. may be viewed in a better prospective.

The Act of 1919 had its impact on the Finance of all provinces and U.P. naturally could be no exception. It would be needless to go into the details of the limitations imposed by the new constitution on the finances of the Provinces, but certain aspects need to be highlighted. The Central Government maintained a rigid control over provincial budgets through various clauses which are too well known to merit repetition. Formerly, or rather prior to 1919, U.P. set apart 20 lakhs of rupees and handed it over to the Central Government for famine requirements.¹⁸ Under the new Act, each Provincial Government was to

18 Keith, A. B., *op. cit.*, p. 228 ff; cf. also *Cambridge, History of India*, Vol. VI (Minto-Morley Reforms).

maintain a minimum balance with the Government of India. But, ironically, it could not borrow from it without the consent of the Governor-General-in-Council. Further, the Government of India had imposed upon the Provincial Governments to conserve their financial resources for some future crisis of important "In the financial interest of India as a whole", as stated earlier.

Another anomaly was to be noticed in the Financial Relations Committee Report popularly known as the Meston Award of 1920. The said Award did not vest powers with the Provincial Government to raise additional funds through fresh taxation. The result was that the Provinces suffered from a lack of funds for the development of Industries, Public Health, etc. The Meston Award had assessed some 240 lakhs for payment to the Central Government in 1921-22. The Assessment had been made on a ratio of gross surplus, and it was here that the defect lay in the whole scheme. Those provinces which spent more of their revenues were liable to gain. For example, whereas U.P. has been assessed to pay a fixed charge of 240 lakhs in the year noted above, the Province of Bombay and Bengal—much more industrially developed states paid only 56 lakhs and 63 lakhs respectively in the same year.¹⁹ To cap this all, there was no provision for the Provinces to meet the demand by levying fresh taxes. Besides, there was discrimination amongst the provinces and some received more than the populous state of U.P. from the Central Government.²⁰

That Act went several steps further in adding fresh burdens on the Provincial funds. Financial relief, prior to the Act of 1919, was met by contributions of three-fourths of the Central Government and one-fourth of the Provinces was now to be met with solely from out of the Provincial revenues. Similar anomalies are to be noticed in the field of Education as well. Education of Europeans and Anglo-Indians was a Reserved subject, whereas Education in general became a Transferred subject. The allocations for the two were quite out of proportions as the budget figures reveal all through the years.²¹ At the same time the tentacles of bureaucracy went on expanding and fresh recruitments were responsible for casting additional burdens on the Provincial Exchequer. The net result was that on the one hand the

19 *Act of 1919, op. cit.*, (Devolution Rules) . cf. Chart payments in Gwyer & Appadurai, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*

Central Government retained its powers in respect of fresh taxation and also for the development of the resources, there was an increase in the burden on the 'Provinces', which were sorely handicapped by meagre resources.

It is apparent from Hailey's Address delivered at the opening of the Budget Session of the Council on 19th February, 1930, that the effects of the two preceding lean years had greatly affected the finances of the State for the coming year.²² Though relief had been granted through revenue remissions and *Tacavi* loans, yet the overall situation was far from satisfactory. We have already referred to the grim warning note sounded by Hailey in regard to political situation obtaining in the Provinces and it was clear that the Government were bent upon spending large sums of money on Police Station-buildings with a view to meet the law and order situation arising out of the intended Civil Disobedience Movement of Congress.²³ The Finance Member proposed to spend a sum of 62 lakhs on Police buildings, 11.5 lakhs on Council House and 2 lakhs on Revenue and Judicial buildings and the money was to be drawn from the Loans Fund.²⁴ This proposal was in itself against the principle as any money drawn from the Loan Fund should have been utilised on productive or quasi-commercial or industrial works which aimed at the development of the 'Provinces'. Moreover, it had been decided in the previous year that not more than 50,000 were to be spent on Police buildings.²⁵ Apparently, the Government sacrificed the principle of utilising the Loans Fund Money on long term development works and diverted such a large sum to suit their own bureaucratic requirements.

It was revealed during the debates on Public Health expenditure that the conduct of the Superintending Engineer of that Department left much that was desired of him. He had been accused of unsympathetic and autocratic behaviour towards the Boards and their members and it was plain that the shield of official support was protecting his misdemeanour and he belonged to that category of officials who believed that there lapses could be easily overlooked by the executive side of the Government.²⁶

22 *Proceedings*, 9th Feb., 1930, (Hailey's Address).

23 *Ibid*

24 *Ibid.*, Budget Allocations presented by Sir George Lambert on 8th March, 1930

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Proceedings*, (Budget allocation presented by Sir George Lambert on 22nd March, 1930).

In so far as Education is concerned there was nothing much to enthuse about, the Education Minister had no enlightened schemes on projects to offer in order to make education meaningful. Merely introduction of the teaching of Agriculture in middle schools without relating it with education in higher classes could not be termed a wise policy. The introduction of Adult Education in select areas could not in any way have been beneficial as there was no uniform policy of carrying the scheme to the large number of masses in rural areas.²⁷ Though the Government had agreed to pay special attention towards girls' education, yet the problem was tackled in a half-hearted manner. The allocation for Education was less than 20 million rupees for a population of nearly 45 million which was proportionately much lower than in states like Bombay whose population figures were also lower in comparison with U.P.

Further, it was revealed that certain gross irregularities were committed in appointment of officers of higher categories. The case of the appointment of the Principal of the Technological Institute at Kanpur was cited as an example—he had been selected without the post being advertised in India.²⁸ Also, the oil expert of the same Institute had been provided a large sum which had been granted to him as pay and allowances with a retrospective effect. While the minister for Industries, R. B. Kushal Pal Singh, maintained a rigid silence over these lapses of the Government, his defence was taken up by the Deputy Secretary for Industries and the Home Minister.²⁹ Apparently, the Department of Industries was in a bad shape and official superiority at the cost of the development of the Industries of the State was quite plain. There were also suggestions and insinuations that pressure was being brought on the Government to appoint a European as the Director of Industries, which, however, was denied by the Minister.³⁰

The agricultural development of the State was also neglected on grounds of financial stringency, thus ruling out any planned development in that sphere for such a largely agriculturist population of the State.

It will thus be seen that the Government did not have any broad-based policy of all-round development work to be carried out during

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*, 8th March, 1930.

29 *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

the course of the years which would affect the well-being of the masses. The Budget showed a lack of foresight and gave the impression that the ministers were really the rubberstamps of the policies of the Provincial Government. While ameliorating steps had been taken in the wake of unfavourable harvests and the general economic slump of those fateful years, the Government seemed more anxious to strengthen and entrench the police force in the 'Provinces' at the cost of any planned development.

The year 1930-31 had been marked by a decrease in revenue to the extent of 95 lakhs which was attributed by the Government to the general fall in prices and the Civil Disobedience Movement launched by the Congress in the State. The land revenue and irrigation dues totalling about 64 lakhs were carried forward in the budget for 1931-32 and the latter was planned to be put down at 13 crores and 35 lakhs.³¹ The Budget presented by the Finance Member, Mr. J. C. Smith, had been framed on certain vital assumptions of which normal monsoon, hardening of prices of agricultural products, willingness of the people to pay off dues and the discontinuance of the Civil Disobedience Movement formed part. The Home Member, Nawab of Chhatari, stated that the people would have to bear the cost of additional punitive police in several districts.³²

So far as Education was concerned a sum of Rs 20048345 was put forth by the Education Minister, Mr. J. P. Srivastava. He reviewed the position of Education in the 'Provinces' submitting that teaching in rural schools had been so based as interest boys in agricultural pursuits. He referred to the progress made in compulsory education in 36 municipalities as well as 379 areas in 25 districts and to the opening of six new Government Training Schools for Vernacular teachers.³³ There was only a provision of 1 lakh to embark upon new schemes and the total expenditure on Education in the 'Provinces' amounted to 16% of the entire provincial revenues. University examination expenditure came in for much criticism but any cut in the allocations or grants to the Universities was strongly resented in view of the increased demand for higher education. The depressed classes education was to be given momentum and the Director of Public Instruction assured the House that none was to be debarred from edu-

31 *Ibid.*, 18th Feb. 1931.

32 *Ibid.*, 12th March, 1931.

33 *Ibid.*

cations on considerations of caste and creed.³⁴ Girls' education was to be paid more attention and Mr. Meckensie as well as the Education Secretary Mr. V. N. Mehta assured the House that spread of education among the depressed classes and girls would receive prime consideration. However, it was admitted by the Director of Public Instruction that there had been a slacking in the expansion of primary education for the last two years which was largely due to lack of funds.³⁵ Earlier (9th March), Mrs. J. P. Srivastava had drawn the attention of the Members towards the pitiable conditions of the women in the 'Provinces', particularly, in the spheres of education, maternity and child welfare.

On discussion of the Land Revenue demand, several members including Rai Rajeshwar Bali felt that without liberal revenue remissions there could be no relief to the acute distress prevailing among the tenantry and the land-lords. The Revenue Secretary referred to the remission made to the extent of Rs. 10 lakhs but at the same time intimated the House that there was no intention on the part of the Government to grant any further remissions.³⁶

The Jail Administration also came under fire and the appointment of the Superintendent of Central Jail came under much criticism as Superintendents were drawn from the Indian Medical Service and the practice had failed to inspire public confidence in them. But the Home Member, Nawab of Chhatari, informed the House that five of the six posts of the Superintendent of Jails were reserved by the Secretary of State for India for IMS Officers.³⁷ The treatment of political prisoners (their being merciless beaten, inhuman treatment and deliberate starvation, was also brought to the notice of the Home Member who, while admitting that such excesses might have been perpetrated requested the Members "to let bygones be bygones".³⁸ Replying to a question regarding the total absence of women in the judiciary, the Home Member assured the House that such appointments would be made, provided suitable women candidates were writing to offer their services.

34 *Ibid.*, 14th March, 1931.

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Ibid.*, 14th March, 1931.

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*, 21st March, 1931 (Vide *I.A.R.*, 1931, Vol I, p 207).

While discussions on the Medical Demand were going on, members protested against the absolute monopoly of the IMS Officers on the post of Inspector-general of Hospitals and to the reservations of 15 posts of Civil Surgeons in the important towns in the 'Provinces' to members of the service. The matter had earlier been called to the notice of the Government and the control exercised by the Government of India in this respect, but the Local Government had paid no heed. The Minister himself confessed that the conditions in the Civil Hospitals were disgraceful.³⁹

A surprise was sprung in the House when the European and Anglo-Indian Community representatives suggested imposition of punitive police, four-times the present number, in Kanpur.⁴⁰ The Anglo-Indian community Representative, while defending the Government, suggested recourse to Marshal Law which, in his opinion, would restore normacy within two hours. The Chief Secretary, however, forcefully deprecated the suggestion.⁴¹

The official mentality towards Indian was clearly reflected when the Finance Member remarked that "years ago the Zamindars were no more than the Kadars",⁴² while revision of the irrigation rates and amendment to the Land Revenue Act were under discussion.

The acting Governor, Sir George Lambert, in his Address to the Council, enumerated the various steps taken by the Local Government in the wake of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.⁴³ He, however, was against any grant of relief to landholders and defended the Government's policies towards the agriculturists. According to him, economic stringency had affected financial position of both the Government and the State's population, and concluded with the remark that "each must bear the share of the unpleasant burden".⁴⁴

The financial position of the State was reviewed by the Governor Sir Malcolm Hailey when the Legislative Council met again on 20th July 1931, after it had adjourned *sine-die* on 31st March. The

39 *Proceedings*, (op. cit.), 1931, the objection was raised by Mr. C. Y. Chintamani.

40 *Ibid.*, 26th March, 1931; the Members concerned were Mr. St George Jackson and H. C. Desanges.

41 *Ibid.*

42 *Proceedings*, (op. cit.), 21st March, 1931.

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Ibid.*

Governor referred to the world-wide depression and the economic disturbance which had caused a huge in the revenues of the State. Since there was no hope of rapid return to normal prices, the finances, according to him, might continue to be greatly disturbed. The Budget calculations had been completely upset and as such, the Local Government "must go back to the expenditure budgets of the early twenties."⁴⁵ This was clearly suggestive of the fact that no development scheme could be undertaken in the ensuing months.

The 1932-33 budget presented by the Finance Member, Mr. Blunt, on 20th February, was essentially on 'Austerity Budget' in which four taxation measures were called for to meet the deficit. The retrenchment policy had been rigorously applied to wipe out a deficit of 144 lakhs and fresh avenues for plugging the waste were to be explored.⁴⁶ So far as the supplementary demand under the CID head was concerned it was vehemently criticised. But Mr. Blunt made a spirited defence so that the cut motion was withdrawn. Similarly, the Irrigation front was also censored in the House to mark its protest against the expenditure of money without previous intimation to it.⁴⁷

Some Members suggested that, as a measure for economy the number of Divisional Commissioners in the 'Provinces' might be reduced but the Finance Members' reply was that the Local Government were in correspondence with higher authorities and he was unable to divulge the nature of correspondence.⁴⁸ Then demand for Education was also criticised on the ground that all the three administrative posts at the headquarters had been or were being held by Europeans. Whether it was the outcome of the Government's deliberate policy of racial discrimination or not was a moot question.⁴⁹ Some Members of the House felt that Indians also be raised to at least one of these posts so that Indian view-point might find adequate expression. But the Director of Public Instruction, Mr. Mackenzie, asserted that the problem of Indianising was different in the Education Department from what it was in the Reserved Departments. Moreover, there were only a few European Officers left in the educational service where their talents were being properly utilised.⁵⁰

45 *Ibid.*, 20th July, 1931.

46 *Ibid.*, 20th Feb., 1932.

47 *Ibid.*

48 *Ibid.*, 1st. March, 1932.

49 *Ibid.*, 3rd. March, 1932.

50 *Ibid.*

The budget grants for Jails and its functioning was vehemently criticised on its policy of awarding A, B and C classes to political prisoners. The consensus among the speakers was that Jail administration was far from satisfactory as the very same persons who were A-Class prisoners formerly in the Civil Disobedience Movement were now being given B & C classes in the Congress campaign.⁵¹ Even the dress of the lady-prisoners charged of Civil Disobedience came in for much criticism along with their food. The Home Member (Nawab of Chhaturi) admitted the mistake in classification of prisoners and expressed his willingness to look into individual cases brought to his knowledge.⁵²

The four taxation measures referred to above were aimed at increasing the revenue of the Provinces and were to be enforced for a period of 2 years. These were supposed of enhancing substantially the income and generally supported by the members. In addition, enhanced Stamp Duties were reimposed in order to tide down the financial distress of the 'Provinces'.⁵³

Even the Excise policy was under fire and abolition of the auction system for the disposal of excise-licenses was sought to be introduced. There was a general support to the resolution in view of the eradication of illicit distillation but the Government's attitude was non-committal.

The ugly face of communal representation was again noticed in the House when Mr. Kailash Srivastava raised the question of providing more adequate representation in the U.P. District Boards. But the Minister-in-charge, Sir Mohd. Yusuf, observed that it was a matter of principle and the argument was not advanced out of communal intent.⁵⁴

A more important item, U.P. Arrears of Rent Bill, passed earlier in the March Session, was placed before the House with the recommendations of the Governor. During the passage of the Bill, the Leader of the Independent Party in the House, had moved an amendment urging that in all cases where remission of rent was granted, remission of revenue to the extent of half the amount of remitted rent should be given. The amendment had been carried against official

51 *Ibid.*, 16th March, 1932.

52 *Ibid.*

53 *Ibid.*, 17th March, 1932.

54 *Ibid.*, 16th June, 1932.

opposition.⁵⁵ But Hailey, instead of giving assent to the Bill, sent it back to the Legislature for reconsideration with the recommendation that the word "half" may be substituted by the words "40%".⁵⁶ Among other things the District Boards Act Amendment Bill was accepted and so also another Bill regarding the Municipalities of United Provinces.

The problem of unemployment attracted the concern of the House and it was suggested that the recommendations of the Federal Finance Committee aiming at revival of provincial contribution to the Central Government should not be accepted.⁵⁷ Among other official Bills the Court of Wards Act of 1912 was to be referred to a Select Committee. A bill to amend the United Provinces Land Revenue Amendment Act of 1932 was passed. When the Council next sat on 24th November, the Governor disallowed a resolution to appoint a committee to enquire into the causes of discontent prevalent about the Judicial administration of Oudh.⁵⁸

The ill-treatment of political prisoners in jails throughout U.P. had been agitating the minds of many members of the House and the matter was raised there. The rank indifference of the Government towards the condition of political prisoners especially in Bareilly and Faizabad jails and the tyrannical measures adopted by jail authorities, it was pointed out, had exceeded the limits of reason, justice and even humanity.⁵⁹ The Government's apathy was clear when the Home Member stated that the reports were exaggerated and that some offenders had been brought to book. In reality, the Government's attitude towards the condition of the political prisoners did not undergo any positive change.

The U.P. Special Powers Bill, which had been introduced in the Council on 5th November, had been referred to a Select Committee which was to submit its recommendations within 10 days, was taken up on 28th November.⁶⁰ Though the Nationalists moved many amendments and opposed it, the Government were able to carry the

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 17th June, 1932.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4th Nov. 1932.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 24th Nov., 1932.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 25th Nov., 1932.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

day with an overwhelming majority. Only one minor amendment—that a maximum fine of Rs. 250/- be imposed on instigators—was acceptable to the Government. Earlier it had been proposed by the Select Committee that the life of the Bill should be three years but the Finance Member, seeing the temper of the House, agreed to the amendment that it should live for a year.⁶¹ Clearly once again the State was to be ruled by Ordinances.⁶²

The year 1933-34 Budget Session commencing on 15th February was memorable from several points of view. The Finance Member presented a picture of the Financial position, as a whole, of the U.P. since the commencement of Reforms of 1919 up to the end of 1933-34 and submitted the total Provincial Revenues from 1921 to 1934. He also explained the reasons for a deficit of some 293 lakhs during the period.⁶³ Another important item discussed in the Council was the 'Court of Wards Amendment Bill' in which the different Zamindars' Associations of Agra were claiming for representation. An important decision regarding the election or nomination of a member was also thrashed out. It was decided that "no person except the President shall be elected or nominated as a member who does not pay Land Revenue or Under Proprietary Rent amounting to Rs. 1500 or who is not in receipt of maintenance allowance of at least Rs. 1200 a year from the State of a proprietor".⁶⁴ It was contended that if the proviso was accepted it would exclude many useful member of the Zamindars' and Taluqdars' communities from being elected in the Court of Wards and was eloquently supported by certain members but the amendment was voted down.

One of the most important deliberations of the Council centred around the consideration of the White Paper on Indian Constitutional Reforms which was placed in the House by the Finance Member. It would be needless to submit the background of this illustrious document which had reached Indian shores on March 19, and had received universal condemnation throughout India.⁶⁵ It had in its background the Simon Commission Report and the three Round Table Conferences

61 *Ibid.*, 30th Nov., 1932

62 *Ibid.*

63 *Ibid.*, 27th Feb. 1933; cf. also *Administrative Report*, 1933-34, No. 6551, pp. 57-63.

64. *Proceedings*, (*op. cit.*), 29th and 30th March, 1933.

65 cf. *I.A.R.*, 1933, Vol. I, pp. 52-63 and also Chintamani and Masani, *India's Constitution at Work*, pp. 174-75 for its Criticism.

and was thus commented upon by the 'Leader', Allahabad: "The scheme may be anything. It is certain it is not a scheme of Self-Government". Some of the reactions of the Members of the Legislature regarding the White Paper are worth quoting. According to Hafiz Mohd. Abraham, the paper clearly showed that India was ruled not for her own benefit but with the object of fulfilling the desires of English businessmen and English officials.⁶⁶ The country was to be governed with a view to do good to the trade of the Home Government at the sacrifice of Indian trade.⁶⁷ The dominating economic interest of Britain at the sacrifice of Indian economic interest and denial of Indians' responsibility in managing their own affairs was the comment of Rai Rajeshwar Prasad. Babu Bikramajit Singh remarked that, according to the provisions of the White Paper, All India Services would continue to be recruited by the Secretary of State with no ministerial control over them. While wide powers were proposed to be given to the Governor-General and the Governor of the 'Provinces', was no scheme of Indianisation of the army. Mr. Edward Ahmed Shah reacted strongly against the provision of recruitment to ICS and IPS services by the Home Government and even the landlord community leaders expressed their disapproval of the White Paper.⁶⁸

It was left to Sir Hailey to hold the olive branch in his Address while reviewing the economic, political and financial situation in the 'Provinces'. He admitted that the White Paper was "somewhat servere in form" and that it set forth "a scheme without argument or justification"⁶⁹ He also referred to the overshadowing of the powers of popular representations by the restrictions imposed upon them. Yet, at the same time, he harped out the exhortation that it was erroneous to think that the proposals "were being presented with the final form of the Constitution engraved on brozen tablets, immutable for all time."⁷⁰ He also referred to the British sincerity in thinking that the

66 *Proceedings*, (op. cit.), 1933, dated 30th March, 1933.

67 *Ibid.*

68 *Ibid.*; Hailey's Speech on 30th March, 1933.

69 *Proceedings*, (op. cit.), 1933, dated 30th March, 1933.

70 *Ibid.*, Hailey's Speech, at least parts of its indicated that he had something to do with the proposals of the White Paper. His words were "I don't think it would help you, if I attempted to penetrate for you the natural reticence of the paper on certain matters, for instance, para 13 of the Introduction . . .". This clearly shows that certain implications of the White Paper were either well known to him or that he had his own ideas about their connotation.

scheme contained in the Paper was intended to benefit the masses of India.

One of the main features of the 1934-35 Budget Session in the United Provinces was the agitation caused by the uncertainty regarding the Agriculturist Relief Act passed last session but the assent for which had not been given by the Governor-General and the Governor. As expected, certain clauses hitting the money-lenders and the landlords were unpalatable and caused much heat in the House.⁷¹

The Cottage Industries and their development arrested the attention of the House next. The minister for Education, Sir J. P. Srivastava, outlined the future policy of the Government which aimed at concentrating at a few select large scale production along with marketing facilities for cottage industries.⁷²

So far as Local Self-Government was concerned, it was a victory for the Select Committee which had recommended several changes in its Municipalities and District Boards Amendment Bills relating to Civil Petitions. Alongside, the Town Areas Act was also amended to allow for enhanced taxation which might provide more contribution to the District Boards.

The Budget proposals for 1934-35 as presented by the Finance Member, Mr. Blunt, opened on an optimistic note and the outstanding features were the following :

- (a) There was to be an increased expenditure on education.
- (b) The loan programme for the Provincial Loans Fund would include sums for *Taqavi*, Local Bodies, Irrigation and Hydro-electric works. It also made provision from out of this Fund for the development of tube-well and transport facilities.
- (c) A permanent cadre of U.P. Services of Engineers was to be created with five posts in class I and 17 in class II.
- (d) No assignment was made for framing Relief Fund.
- (e) Five percent cut in salaries was to be retained.
- (f) Taxation to raise revenues by reimposing Stamp Duties with a view to wipe out the deficit to the extent of more than 85 lakhs was voted.⁷³

71 *Proceedings*, (*op. cit.*), 11th April, 1934.

72 *Ibid.*, 23rd. Feb., 1934.

The Budget proposals as outlined by Mr. Blunt were, according to him, to place the future Finance Minister under the new Constitution of 1935, on a sound economic standing.⁷⁴ Though fresh taxation had been envisaged and retrenchment policy together with a 5% cut in salaries was to be retained, there was sufficient justification for such steps. Duty on Sugar was severely criticised as affecting both the cultivator and the consumer.⁷⁵ However, the minister, Mr. Srivastava, stated that the State Government had no say in the imposition of the said duty.

The Public Health Department under Local Self-Government Minister, Sir Mohammad Yusuf, came in for vehement criticism. The Minister pleaded on the ground of lack of funds, though the Department was manned by highly paid officers. A large sum of money was spent on salaries and economy—suggestions fell on deaf ears while rural sanitation remained grossly neglected. The financial stringency ground was a hollow one.⁷⁶

The problem of mounting unemployment was raised in the House and a Member of the House stated that "a time was fast approaching when the growing menace of unemployment will surely lead either to a revolution or armed uprising".⁷⁷ The five Universities of the State had been turning out thousands of graduates who had a little chance of getting employment. The question, according to the Minister, was an economic one and related to the industrial development of the State for which the Government had appointed an Industries Re-organisation Committee. He hoped that educated young men or at least a section of them would get employment in industrial occupations when the Committee's proposals were put into practice.⁷⁸

The April Session of the U.P. Legislature was a memorable one and Sir Malcolm Hailey in his Address to the Members of the Council gave reasons for sending the Agriculturists Relief Bill to the Council for reconsideration. It was clear that the Governor's sympathies were with the money-lending classes. His argument was that in case of the

73 *Ibid.*, 7th March, 1934.

74 *Ibid.*, 9th March, 1934.

75 *Ibid.*

76 *Ibid.*

77 *Ibid.*, The warning was sounded by Syed Jaffer Hussain, from Moradabad on 19th April (1934) when the Budget proposals were discussed.

78 *Ibid.*

creditor being denied facilities for securing repayment, there would be a general loss of confidence which would react gravely on credit not only applied to Agriculture but other transactions as well. He concluded "if in attempting to relieve the indebtedness of one class, we cut under the general operation of credit, we may cause mischief, the full extent of which none of us can foresee".⁷⁹ ,

It will thus be seen that, after several vicissitudes, the finances of the State had, towards the beginning of 1934, been restored to a sound position, though there was very little attempt to cater to the dire necessities of the masses throughout the 'Provinces'. Health-hazards in rural areas remained as before and there had been no attempt to make any cuts in the higher services which were eating up a large part of the Budget allocations on Public Health. The hollowness of Minister's plea of lack of funds was fully rebutted and it was pointed out to him that only a day before he had waxed eloquence on the allocations made by Mr. Blunt.

The referring back of the Agriculturists Relief Act by Hailey for a reconsideration and his concern for the money-lending class as well as the landlords did not sugar well for the rural population and they were to remain shackled by debts. Hailey's bias towards the feudals is clearly reflected in this action as well.

⁷⁹ *Proceedings*, (*op. cit.*), 9th April ; (Hailey's Address to House).

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